

SOVIET LITERATURE

Monthly

This number is devoted to the literature of the Soviet republics of Central Asia. You will find work by the founder of the new Tadjik literature Aini; the prominent Kazakh writer Auezov; the Uzbek dramatist Kakhar; the pioneer of Turkmen realistic prose Sarykhanov; the Tadjik poet Ibrat Gulistan-zade and many others.

8

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SOVIET LITERATURE

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EDITORIAL

Our magazine is called *Soviet Literature*; this title, however, signifies the plural, and should read "Soviet Socialist Literatures."

Indeed, the Soviet Union is a land of numerous and diverse literatures, hallmarked and united by one dominant idea—the building of a new social order. These literatures differ in language, and national customs and historical traditions impart to them inimitable originality; their seekings bear specific and individual qualities.

In our country poetry, prose, plays, and critical reviews are published in more than 50 languages. Peoples deprived of all rights before the Revolution possess now written languages of their own. Thus, in the Far North-East, where the two hemispheres meet, a new literature—that of the Chukchi, kindred of the Alaskan Eskimos, has come into the world. A mere 27 years ago the Chukchi were an illiterate people without an alphabet of their own. Today one of them has written a book (*Men From Our Shore* by Yuri Ryt-kheu) which has been translated into the languages of the peoples of the Soviet Union and foreign languages.

There are literatures in our country barely out of their childhood; others are still in their adolescence. Alongside these, however, we can boast of literatures of thousand-years' standing with sources leading to ancient folklore, time-worn manuscripts, stone plates.

Some day you may chance to visit Tashkent, the capital of the Uzbek Republic. In the local libraries and museums you will learn of the ancient inscriptions on the tomb-stones of Kul-Tegin and see the time-honoured records of the writings of the great Ali Sir Nevai. Should you display further interest, there is a pleiadum of modern Uzbek writers to make the acquaintance of; their works differ in style and content, and are devoted to the historical past and to Soviet contemporaneity as well. Gafur Gulyam's verses and poems have a vast popularity, not only in the original Uzbek, but in the Russian and other languages of the Soviet Union as well. You will leaf through Abdulla Kakhar's stories, Kamil Yashen's dramas. . . but why name them all? Suffice it to say that there, in the heart of Soviet Asia, a literature, national in form and language and socialist in content is in the making.

If you ever find yourself in Baku, the capital of Azerbaidjan, you will hear of the outstanding thinker and poet of the 12th century, Nizami Gandzhevi and of a number of fine present-day poets as well—of Samed Vurgun, for instance, whose poems are very popular in the Soviet Union. In local libraries you will find scores of novels, dramas, and poems by contemporary Azerbaidjan authors.

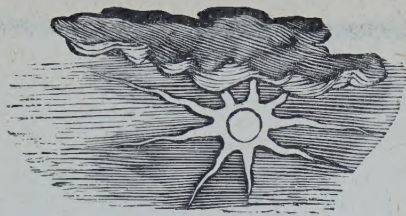
And if chance or circumstance brings you to Alma-Ata, the capital of Soviet Kazakhstan, to Ashkhabad, the capital of the Turkmen Republic or to the Kirghiz Republic, at every turn, whether it be in library or book shop, you will come across hundreds of books which go to make up the literatures of those peoples!

We should like to acquaint our readers with our Central Asian literatures at length—both those that have but recently acquired a written language in the course of national development, and those which possess their own classics and experienced modern writers. But this is beyond our power, for were an annual set of issues of our magazine assigned to this task, they would not suffice for even a fraction of all that is being put out in Soviet Asia in the course of but one year. At the utmost we can present a few selected works and passages by writers from those parts, and add a review or two on the various authors of poetry and prose in Soviet Central Asia.

Literary works of the various nationalities are widely read in our country. Thus, the verses of Rasul Rza, the Azerbaidjan poet, are read by Georgians and Russians in their respective tongues, Auezov's epopee is enjoyed by Ukrainians and Russians alike, while the works of Tursun-zade, the Tadjik poet, have been translated into all the languages of the Soviet Union. And thus it is everywhere. National seclusion has been done away with; the literatures of the national minorities have crossed the borderlines of their republics and have won millions of devoted readers far and wide, whatever the language of the publication. Therefore, when we speak of "Soviet Literature," we have in mind, first and foremost, the spiritual unity of Soviet writers everywhere.

Writers of Asia and Africa are to meet in Tashkent shortly to discuss matters of mutual interest. This will be a get-together of men of letters representing the free nations as well as nations not fully awakened as yet but which are gaining strength in the battle against colonialism. It is our firm belief that this gathering will bear rich fruit. Writers of various lands will come to know each other better and will gain an understanding of the hopes, aspirations, views, and emotions of their fellows. There will be many a friendly handclasp there; new and long-looked-for acquaintances will be struck up.

Our current number is devoted to the literatures of Soviet Central Asia. This is but a beginning and more is to come. Our future issues, like our past ones, will carry literary works of the various peoples of the Soviet Union, and we shall keep acquainting our readers with the multitude of Soviet literatures.



Mirzo *TURSUN-ZADE*

THE VOICE OF ASIA

You hear the proud voice of new Asia,
We, the Asian nations, are calling.
'Tis the roar of a newly-born ocean;
'Tis the thunder of liberty rolling;
'Tis Asia awaking to struggle
For justice, for friendship with others,
Her heart, like a bird's, palpitating
In unison true with her brothers.
Remember Hafiz' verses:
"In the dark night we sail o'er the main;
"We envy land-dwellers their safety
"And they're deaf to our plight and our pain. . . ."
Today we are envying no one,
Our torture has come to an end,
True comrades we find in all countries—
Every man, every woman our friend.
We fear neither fate nor ill weather;
Our brothers will help us in need,
You hear—this is Asia waking,
At last from captivity freed.

In all the world no tyranny, no power—
However foul and ruthless its intent—
Can crush the will, the confidence, the spirit
Of a nation that on liberty is bent
The hour has come for millions upon millions
From ancient Nile to distant Eastern shore
All Asia is awaking from its slumber
Its voice will shake this planet to the core.

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg



MUKHTAR AUEZOV

THE CASE OF THE STOLEN *Bride*



BLACK, starless sky hung low over the earth. The small courtyard of the house where Abai was staying was cloaked in darkness. The shadows were thickest under the roof of the shed; night herself seemed to be lurking there. The air was still, the silence broken only by the distant barking of dogs.

Four men and a young woman crouched in the shadows of the darkest corner of the yard, waiting for their comrade who had gone inside the house to seek out Abai. Their horses were out of sight behind the stables. Presently a door slammed and a figure appeared on the step. It was Darmen. His friends hurried towards him.

"What did he say? Did he scold you?"

"No, he did not scold me. But he says we must cross the river at once and seek shelter in the town. As soon as we find a reliable hiding place we must submit a petition in Maken's name. 'My son Abish will write it for us,' he said. Come, we have no time to lose!"

Darmen took the young woman by the hand—it was Maken, his betrothed—and together they hurried to the horses. Abdi, Darmen's best friend, untied the grey horse and led it over to Maken. She sprang lightly into the saddle and they set off. Darmen and Abdi rode on either side of her, while Kakitai, Muha and Almagambet, loyal comrades who had chosen to share with Darmen the dangers and ordeals awaiting him, brought up the rear. As soon as they were out of the gate they spurred their horses and galloped through the dark, deserted street towards the Irtysh.

It was late. The ferry boat already stood at its mooring on the opposite pier and the boatmen from Upper and Lower Zhataki had gone home. It would have fared ill with the fugitives had Abai not taken the precaution of giving Darmen the address of a friendly boatman named Seil. Kakitai quickly found

A chapter from the novel *The Progress of Abai*.



Mukhtar Auezov was born in 1897 into the family of a Kazakh nomad cattle-breeder. Auezov received his education at Leningrad University. Since 1930, having got his degree in Tashkent, he has worked as teacher and research worker. He is the author of many works on history of Kazakh culture, folklore, and literature. In 1946 Auezov was elected a member of Kazakh Academy of Sciences.

He began his literary career at the age of seventeen. His play *Enlik-Kebek* (1917), based on a popular legend, was the first Kazakh drama.

In the period of 1917-1949 Auezov wrote twenty original plays and translated

the little flat-roofed house on the top of the steep river bank where Seil lived and explained his errand to him. The boatman called two of his young helpers who lived next door and told them to get the boat ready at once.

Since Seil's boat was not big enough to hold all of the fugitives together with their horses, it was decided that Almagambet and Muha, taking five of the horses, would spend the night with a Kazakh acquaintance in Upper Zhataki and cross over to town the following morning. As soon as Kakitai, Abdi, Darmen, and Maken with her grey horse were settled in the boat, the oarsmen set out with all speed towards the opposite shore, now invisible in the blackness.

Suddenly the silence of the night was broken by the loud clatter of hoofs—ten horsemen were galloping furiously down the Tobykty¹ caravan road towards the river, in pursuit of the fugitives. The trail led them to the house Darmen and his comrades had just quitted; they had suspected that Darmen would go to Abai for help.

The leader of the pursuers, Dayir, a man with a goatee beard, a fleshy nose and long horsey teeth, stopped his men at the gate, dismounted and went into the yard. He wanted to inspect the barn and stable before going into the house; he did not wish to go to Abai without having some tangible evidence. Dayir searched all the corners of the yard and peered into the stable, but there was no sign of the fugitives. Baffled and annoyed, he was about to turn back when he saw the watchman in his ragged cloak limping towards him from the direction of the warehouse. Here was the man to question!

The simple-minded fellow, when pressed by Dayir, informed him that a short while ago six riders, one of them a woman, had entered the courtyard. One of them had gone into the house, but had reappeared soon afterward, whereupon they had all remounted their horses and ridden off down the street.

¹ *Tobykty*—a Kazakh tribe, to which Abai belonged, and a region of that name.

Dayir had guessed that the fugitives would not risk stopping for the night at Abai's house or anywhere else in the village but would try to cross the river to the town, where it would be easier for them to elude capture. But he doubted whether they would find anyone to ferry them across the Irtysh at this hour of the night. And so before setting off in pursuit, Dayir sent one of his men to the house of the trader Seiseke where Urazbai lived to let them know what had happened. Then he leapt on to his foamy horse and hurried off in the direction the watchman had pointed out.

Dayir and Urazbai belonged to the same clan and had been born in the same *aul*.¹ They were bosom friends and had no secrets from each other. Moreover, Maken, who had eloped with Darmen, was *jesir*² not only to Dayir, but to Urazbai as well. It was not Darmen, a man without kith or kin, whom Dayir blamed for the kidnapping of Maken, but Urazbai's old enemy Abai, and he told his men to assure Urazbai that he would not rest until he had brought Maken back and avenged his honour, that he would perish rather than give up the search for the girl and her seducer, and was ready to pursue them to the end of the earth if need be.

"Tell Urazbai I expect him to help me!" Dayir told Zhemtik, his messenger.

Zhemtik, a pock-marked, shifty-eyed man with a slit of a mouth and a black beard, had no difficulty in finding the trader's house. With soft, cat-like steps he entered the handsomely furnished room where at a small low table sat Seiseke, Urazbai and their friend, the pot-bellied Yesentai. Squatting humbly on his haunches in the doorway and working his way gradually towards the table Zhemtik proceeded to relate how Maken had fled with Abai's man Darmen and how Dayir had set out in pursuit.

When he heard the tidings, Urazbai flew into a fearful rage. He behaved like a shaman possessed with devils. He heaped curses upon the head of Abai. He swore to track down the fugitives, bring them back to the village bound hand

into the Kazakh a number of Russian and foreign classical dramas.

Yet his greatest achievement lies in the field of prose writing. At the start of his literary career he wrote a number of short stories dealing with life of the pre-Revolution villages. Later he wrote of the present-day life of the Kazakh people (*Transformation of Hassan, Hunter with an Eagle, Tracks, etc.*). His major and most widely-known work is the novel about Abai Kunanbayev (1845-1904), the Kazakh poet and enlightener, the founder of Kazakh written literature and national language. The first two volumes of the novel appeared in 1947, the third, *The Progress of Abai*, was published in 1958.

In this issue we publish a chapter from the third book.

¹ *aul*—a village.

² *jesir*—a woman for whom the kalym, or dowry, has been fully paid, thus making her the property of the family that has paid for her.

and foot, tie them to the tail of a horse, and drive the horse at a mad gallop over the steppes until they were dashed to pieces.

Seiseke too, taking his cue from Urazbai, cursed Abai and the fugitives. The stout Yesentai alone remained unperturbed and his little eyes, almost hidden in rolls of fat, were expressionless. He was considered the chief of the large Sarmurzi clan and was notorious for his malevolent intrigues. He was Urazbai's right-hand man in all the clan feuds and quarrels, and it was even rumoured that in their youth they had been horse thieves.

Unlike the blustering Urazbai, Yesentai spoke little. Urazbai when roused would vent his fury in a torrent of foul language, outshouting his opponent and foaming at the mouth in his rage. Yesentai, on the other hand, would wait quietly until his antagonist had to pause for breath and would then begin to speak in a calm, deliberate manner. In inter-tribal disputes he always contrived to be the last to speak, after the fury of the others had already spent itself. He took particular pleasure in baiting those who, deceived by his imperturbable demeanour, were foolish enough to engage him in wordy warfare. Surveying his victim through half-closed eyelids, he would calmly proceed to pour a torrent of mockery and abuse upon the poor man's head. There were many steppe tribal chiefs who envied Yesentai his ability to outwit his foes.

In the meantime Urazbai continued to fume. On learning that Abai was staying in the village he swore to take revenge on him as well.

"I'll make the scoundrel pay for this!" he cried. "This time I'll take him by the collar and force him on to his knees! If only we can catch him giving shelter to Darmen and Maken!"

And late as it was he ordered the carriage and sent Yesentai and Seiseke off at once to Abai. The two men seated themselves in the roomy two-wheeler, the coachman cracked his whip, and the fleet-footed white Arab bore them swiftly down the slumbering street.

Yesentai, leaning over to Seiseke, said in a low voice:

"Bai, you do not care for these feuds and you are none too skilled at them. Let me talk to Abai, you sit beside me and say nothing."

Notwithstanding the lateness of the hour Abai, deeply disturbed by what had happened, had not yet retired to rest when the unbidden guests arrived. They entered the room without warning, their greetings were curt. Abai closed the book that lay before him, took off his glasses and signed to his faithful old servant Baimagambet to close the door. Baimagambet understood that Abai did not wish to be disturbed during the forthcoming interview. Closing the door tightly, he squatted down beside Abai.

Yesentai, wasting no time on preliminaries, at once explained the reason for his call, mentioned the fugitives by name, and described Urazbai's wrath.

"Well, Ibrahi, what have you to say?" he demanded, narrowing his tiny slits of eyes, and deliberately using the familiar "thou" although Abai was his senior. It was he who had started to call the poet by his first name, contrary to the rules of propriety, and following his example, Urazbai and his cronies also began to refer to Abai as the Ibrahi of Kunanbai, or simply Ibrahi.

Abai knew that once Yesentai had been chosen as spokesman nothing good could come of the interview, and he decided to take the bull by the horns. "What is it you want of me?" he demanded, his eyes flashing.

The slits of Yesentai's eyes widened a trifle.

"I have come to hear your explanation of this affair, Ibrahi."

Abai decided to accept the challenge.

"I consider that the young people have made a mistake, they have wronged Dayir and Urazbai. I do not justify their action."

Yesentai and Seiseke exchanged puzzled glances: they had not expected Abai to agree with them so easily. But Yesentai quickly recovered his composure—he would not let himself be deceived!

"A mistake, you say? They are in the wrong? Then they must be punished!"

There was undisguised hatred in Yesentai's voice.

"What punishment do you seek?" Abai asked.

"I shall tell you! Urazbai instructed me to say this to you: if you do not approve of these criminals hand them over to us. Urazbai will throw a noose over their necks, tie them to the tail of a horse, and turn it loose in the steppe."

"He will agree to nothing less?"

"No, he forbade us to discuss anything else."

"Then tell him that the days of such cruel punishments are gone!" said Abai, suppressing his fury with difficulty. "Shame on him for having harboured such evil plans, and on you for daring to come to me with this message!"

"Now Ibrahi," cried Yesentai, his customary composure deserting him, "I did not come here to bandy words with you. If that is your attitude, then listen further. Urazbai bade me tell you this as well: 'This time,' he said, 'I shall not be content with punishing the runaways, but I shall not rest until I have destroyed Abai, for he is the true culprit of this base deed. If he sides with that dog Darmen, I shall find those who will help me. I shall set the town's cut-throats upon him and they will tear him to pieces! Let Ibrahi not think his person is so sacred!' Those were his words!"

Yesentai, his face suffused with rage, seemed about to fall upon Abai himself. It was a long time since the poet had had to listen to such foul, coarse insults.

"You have come to start fresh discord!" he said in a voice of suppressed anger. "Go! Go, and tell Urazbai that if he does not cease his evil doings he will bitterly repent it. Let him not forget that there are forces capable of destroying him too! And now get you hence at once!"

Abai, his brow knitted and his eyes flashing in anger, presented such a menacing figure that Yesentai rose without a word and trying hard to preserve his dignity moved towards the door. Seiseke slunk out after him.

In the meantime Dayir was nosing about the village like a hound sniffing out the trail. He had sent off his horsemen to scour the waterfront in the direction of the Upper and Lower Zhataki, and through the streets and by-ways of the settlement. But the runaways seemed to have vanished into space.

When Urazbai and Seiseke learned that Dayir's search had been fruitless they concluded that some boatman must have ferried the fugitives across the river at night, but that the boat could not have returned yet. Hence it could be traced. Seiseke sent for the merchant Korabai, a notorious villain who could be depended upon to carry out any foul deed without compunction.

Korabai quickly harnessed his horses, took two of his toughest workmen with him, and hastened down to the deserted riverside. There he found Dayir and told him of Urazbai's suspicions. The two decided to watch for the return of the boat. They did not have long to wait—the splash of oars soon reached their ears. A boat was approaching the shore, slipping slowly through the dark water. Before long they were able to make out the dim figures of the oarsmen. Dayir signed to his men and they surrounded the jetty just as Seil stepped ashore.

"Who did you ferry across the river at this time of night?" Korabai demanded.

Seil ignored the question and told his oarsmen to pick up their oars. Dayir and his men, seeing that nothing was gained by violence and threats, tried another tack:

"Wait, boatman! Take us across first!"

"We'll pay you as much as those others!"

"Take us over, friend, we're in a hurry!"

The tall, powerfully built Seil continued to busy himself with his boat without replying, helping his two oarsmen to haul it out on to the pebbled beach.

Korabai lost his temper. "Why do you turn your ugly mug away from me?" he cried. "Is my money worse than anyone else's? Get into your boat at once!"

But Seil was not one to be easily frightened.

"You're wasting your breath," he said calmly. "I finished my work late and I'm too tired to move a finger. Besides, what boatman would agree to ferry back and forth across the Irtysh in this darkness? I know what I'm doing. If you're in such a hurry, come tomorrow early, and I'll take you across."

Whereupon he shouldered his boat-hook and called his oarsmen:

"Time to turn in, fellows!"

Korabai, seeing his quarry escaping him, choked back his anger and said in a quieter tone: "You can tell us at least who you took across now, can't you? Why did you agree to take him at this time of night?"

"Yes, who was it?" Dayir put in. "Friends of yours from the town or strangers from the steppes?"

Seil hid a mocking smile: "My friends are the coins I get for ferrying people across. I don't look at the faces of the people I take in my boat. What do I care who they are? Besides, it was too dark to see."

And with that Seil strode off towards his house.

Korabai and Dayir did not detain him. Instead they turned their attention to one of the oarsmen who was still lingering by the boat, in the hope that he might prove more amenable. And sure enough, by dint of threats and promises they finally elicited the information that Seil had ferried to the other side three horsemen and a woman. They seemed to be steppe folk, and from what they said

the oarsman had gathered they were bound for the waterfront settlement. They had with them one grey horse with a side saddle.

Now Dayir knew for certain that he was on the right track, for when he had pursued the fugitives along the caravan route from distant Chinghis, he had learned from the villagers en route what breed their horses were. The oarsman also told him that two of the five men had remained with the horses on this side of the river intending to take them across to town in the morning.

In the meantime Darmen and his friends, after landing on the opposite bank beside the steam flour mill in the centre of the town, were making their way to the waterfront settlement, on the outskirts of Semipalatinsk where the river workers lived. It was a long way, and the deep sand made walking very difficult. Moreover the road wound sharply up and down the steep bank of the Irtysh. At last a dense huddle of buildings came into sight—the sheepskin and felt boot factories, the tannery, brewery and vodka distillery—and just beyond it, the settlement began.

Not far from here the Irtysh describes a large loop, forming a broad back-water that affords convenient mooring for all kinds of steamers and barges. It was here, on the banks of the Irtysh, that the river workers had built their huts which stood in rows on either side of the long and narrow streets.

Most of the labouring folk here worked as loaders. During the navigation season they hauled thousands of poods of cargo on their backs, and when the summer work ended they took any odd jobs that came along. Kazakh peasants, forced by poverty to abandon their homes in the villages in search of a living, found work on the waterfront, and though the work was exhausting it saved them and their families from dying of starvation.

Unlike the inhabitants of the town and the village on the other side of the river, the river workers kept to themselves and rarely ventured beyond their own settlement. But on the Moslem feast-days of Ramazan and Kurban the fame of the rivermen spread far and wide among the Kazakh and Tatar population of the town. These silent, powerfully built men with their massive shoulders and thick muscular legs always won in the games and contests held on the squares of Semipalatinsk on these festive occasions. The town's leading wrestlers were unable to withstand their deadly waist-grip which would send them crashing down on to the ground as if their legs had given way beneath them, and before they knew it, they would be seized by the collar and thrown flat on to their backs. This came to be known as the "rivermen's grip," and spectators told fantastic stories about those wrestling bouts.

In planning their flight Darmen and Abdi had depended for help not only on Abai, but on the rivermen as well. Abdi had once worked for about two years on the waterfront and had some good friends and acquaintances among the workers there. Darmen too had often visited the place during the long period of his enforced stay in Semipalatinsk. Dropping into the workers' homes with his *dombra*, he would delight and amaze his hosts with his gift for verse making and singing.

Now Abdi and Darmen had decided to seek shelter in the home of their trusty mutual friend Aben, who lived in a small two-room cottage. By the time the

weary travellers reached Aben's house, its inmates were already fast asleep. A tall slender woman, Aben's wife, Ayisha, opened the gate for them. Abdi entered first, leaving his companions in the courtyard. A moment later the lights went on in the house and Aben himself, a pale-faced Kazakh with a jet-black moustache, came out to bid his guests welcome.

He led them into the inner room while Ayisha busied herself at the samovar and the stove.

The men did not wish to give their host all the details of the flight in Maken's presence, they merely gave him to understand that Darmen and Maken had to go into hiding at once. They must be concealed from curious eyes and wagging tongues.

Aben nodded—he had taken in the situation at a glance—and he suggested that there should be no outside communication with the fugitives except by night.

"And even by night you must avoid being seen on our street," he added. "There are dogs in every house and they will raise enough noise to wake the whole settlement. What with the inquisitive neighbours we have, there is bound to be talk."

It was decided to send Kakitai at once to Abish. The petition of which Abai had spoken had to be drawn up without delay and submitted to the office of the district chief and to the local court. When Kakitai was ready to leave, Darmen gave him a sealed envelope containing Abai's letter to Abish.

Kakitai mounted Maken's grey, which had been standing in the courtyard, his head rearing above the low fence for all the world to see, and Aben led the rider out of the yard on to a safe, deserted road where he was not likely to meet anyone.

When Kakitai reached the house of Daniyar the household was still up. Without taking off his cloak, Kakitai handed Abish the letter from Abai and explained the circumstances that had caused him to intrude on his host at this late hour. As he told his story he paced up and down the room in great agitation, his voice frequently breaking. Abish, while listening, ran his eyes over the letter written in the neat familiar hand of his father.

Urazbai, the greatest villain of the steppe, a bai who never forgave an injury, had been enraged by the kidnapping of Maken, Kakitai said. He had heard that Urazbai was in town, the situation was very grave, and all those who were helping Darmen and Maken must be prepared for trouble.

While Kakitai spoke, Abish finished reading the letter and handed it to Kakitai to read.

"You know how much Darmen has come to mean to me," Abai wrote. "Besides, his popularity among the people too has been steadily increasing from year to year. I am glad that you have always been well disposed towards him and now you must show that you are a true friend to him. A bad friend is like a shadow—on clear days you cannot run away from it however hard you try, and in bad weather you cannot find it however hard you search for it. I have tried to shield you from these steppe feuds and until now I have fought alone, protecting

the weak and defenceless as best as I could. Now it is your turn. Darmen and Maken have done right to take refuge in town. After all, the Russian laws are better framed for the protection of human rights than the law of the Sharia. You know how to talk to judges and officials since you associate with them. But, remember, you must be prepared for a bitter struggle."

Kakitai returned the letter to Abish in silence—he had known they could depend on Abai. Abish asked Daniyar to get the two-wheeler ready at once, and in the meantime he sat down at his desk and wrote two petitions on behalf of Maken Azimova, a Kazakh girl who had fled from the steppes and its tribal customs and asked the authorities to afford her protection. One petition was addressed to the Semipalatinsk uyezd chief; the other, to the chairman of the district court.

Abish then drew a light cloak over his shoulders and put on a Tatar cap in order that he might pass for a merchant in the dark. He and Kakitai were about to leave when Magish announced that she wished to accompany them. In vain did the men try to dissuade her.

"Maken is my closest friend," she said. "I love her like a sister. And now that she is in such danger I must see her. I shall not rest until I meet her and talk with her. Who knows, we may never see each other again. I implore you to take me with you!"

Magish had resolved to accompany her husband as soon as she learned that Maken was in town. And now she gazed at Abish, her large grey eyes so full of gentle pleading that he gave in.

Abish understood his wife's feelings and, embracing her tenderly, he said, "Very well, come along!"

Magish hastily dressed herself and they went out into the courtyard. Since there was only room for two in the little cart, Kakitai had to ride on the box. The spirited black horse bore them swiftly down the silent streets of the sleeping town.

In Aben's house everyone slept but Darmen who lay fully dressed beside the sleeping Maken. As soon as he heard the cart stop before the house he ran outside and opened the gate.

Maken, always a light sleeper, woke at once. When she saw Magish she rushed to meet her and the two women fell into each other's arms. Their hearts were filled with a presentiment of the troubles and dangers awaiting them and as they kissed each other's eyelids they tasted the salt of bitter tears.

Abish came in, interrupting their silent caresses. He gave Maken the petitions to sign. The girl obediently wrote her name in large letters on the two documents he had drawn up.

Aben came in and the men outlined a plan of action. It was decided to send one of the horses across the Irtysh in the morning and put it out to pasture in the woods nearby; in case of emergencies it could bring a rider speedily to Daniyar's house in town where Abish and Kakitai would keep the other horses ready. It was also agreed that from the following morning Almagambet and Muha would remain constantly with Darmen and Maken to protect them from harm.

After everything had been decided Abish, Kakitai and Magish drove back to Semipalatinsk by the same circuitous route as before. As they crossed the city square near the steam mill, three large boats moored at the pier and Dayir's men stepped out. With them were six horses and a cart. Korabai had evidently managed to find a boatman to take them over the Irtysh before dawn after all.

After their friends had gone, Darmen and Maken went back to bed again but not to sleep, for they were too disturbed by what had taken place. But both pretended to sleep for fear of disturbing the other's rest.

Darmen had first met Maken when he was twenty-five. Love's shafts had not yet pierced his young heart, though he had always taken pleasure in watching his young friends falling in love and willingly accepted the role of mediator between lovers. He had witnessed with delight the blossoming of the love between Abish and Magish, and he rejoiced in their happiness.

When Abish went to fetch his bride from the distant Tatar aul Darmen had accompanied him. He spent twenty days with his friends amid the picturesque surroundings of Keregetas, where the villagers camped for the summer, and in those never-to-be-forgotten days he found his own happiness—he met Magish's friend Maken.

Their love blossomed under the beneficent rays of that warm and tender feeling that Abish and Magish cherished for each other, although the newly-married couple made no attempt by word or gesture to bring the two young people together. They merely showed a friendly interest in the young lovers. But doubtless the very association with them fed the flame of true love in the pure young hearts of Darmen and Maken. Exactly when that flame flared up in the heart of Darmen, on which of the twenty days he had spent in the aul the miracle had come to pass he could not have said. Perhaps it had happened on that moonlit night when at Abish's request they had sung together; or perhaps on the following day when they had gone for a walk all four of them far beyond the village, and the two young people had suddenly found themselves alone; or perhaps on that lovely evening when Darmen had delighted the villagers with his beautiful songs accompanying himself on the *dombra*. . . .

Maken lived with her mother in a tumbledown shack. When Darmen came there one evening with Abish and Magish, the mother had regarded him with suspicion, for she guessed that the young man had come to woo her daughter. But the young *akyn*¹ with his gentle manner and his moving songs won her heart at once and she secretly blessed the kind fate that had brought him to their home. She fervently hoped this visit might not be his last.

Soon Darmen's name was on the lips of all the inhabitants of the aul, the young *akyn* became a favourite of old and young alike. As for Maken, her love for him grew stronger day by day and she looked for his coming each time with eager impatience. The poet had cast a spell over her with his songs which she now

¹*akyn*—a bard.

heard day and night in her native village, on the streets and at gatherings, and still more when she and Darmen were alone. Another sacred bond between the two young people were the verses and songs of Abai.

When Darmen sang "Thou Art the Light of My Eyes," or when his voice throbbed with the mournful melody of "Heavy Is My Soul," or when he met Maken with the words: "Hail to Thee, Kalamkas!" her heart almost stood still with joy. On Darmen's lips Abai's verses had a greater charm and appeal, and Maken could listen endlessly to him when he sang "No Surcease for My Broken Heart," casting tender glances at her the while.

Thus did the verse and the melodies of Abai fan the flame of true love in the hearts of the two young lovers. Neither of them had ever been in love before and they could not understand what ailed them. Not a single word of love had passed between them, for each of them it was a carefully cherished secret. They did not even suspect that their friends and kinsmen had guessed their feeling for each other long before they had admitted it to themselves. Abish and Magish had been the first to notice how matters stood between the two, and they deliberately encouraged Darmen to sing Maken's favourite songs and waited impatiently for him to declare his love.

One evening the young people went for a walk. Magish had thrown the end of her long silken shawl around the slender figure of Maken, and the two young women walked close together beside the young men, listening to Darmen's gay songs.

When the moon rose Abish and Magish separated from the group and Darmen remained with Almagambet, Maken, and another girl. Suddenly a man on a dark-grey horse appeared on the path, a fat elderly man with a black goatee beard and a fleshy nose. Ignoring the greeting of the young men, he shouted to the girls:

"Which of you is Maken? You? Come over here!"

Darmen and Almagambet exchanged glances—they did not like the stranger's uncouth behaviour. But Maken evidently knew him, for she obediently went over. It was her *amenger*¹ Dayir.

Five years before when Azim, Maken's father, was still alive, Dayir who was a close kinsman of Bai Urazbai had betrothed Maken to his youngest brother Kayir. After Azim's death his widow was left to bring up her daughter alone and became completely dependent on the relatives of her future son-in-law whose help, meagre though it was, served to keep her and Maken from starvation.

Although the girl had never seen her future bridegroom she had to submit to her fate. A year ago Kayir had been thrown from his horse and killed. But even this did not release the young bride from the marriage contract. Kayir's eldest brother, the 40-year-old Dayir, who was married to a nagging and unlovely woman, came to Maken's mother and claimed the girl for his bride.

¹*amenger*—the relative of a deceased bridegroom or husband who, according to adat, has the right to wed the dead man's bride or widow.

"Now that my brother is dead I shall marry Maken myself. You must bring her to my house in the autumn."

Dayir had been away from home when Abish and his friend Darmen had arrived in the Tatar aul. But from spies sent secretly to the aul his kinsmen had learned how things stood between Darmen and Maken, and as soon as Dayir returned they lost no time in informing him that Maken had been going about shamelessly in company with the young men from Abai's aul.

Dayir, who like Urazbai considered Abai and his followers to be his own sworn enemies, leapt on to his horse and set out at once to the Tatar village. Here luck was with him—he came upon his betrothed walking out with the *jigits*.¹

When the girl came quietly over to him in answer to his summons, he turned on her in fury.

"Go home to your mother at once!" he shouted. "And tell her I shall come soon and take you away from here to my own house!"

Maken flushed crimson with shame and humiliation.

"Why do you shout at me?" she said.

"Shut your mouth!" Dayir snarled. "And go home at once!"

"I am not your wife yet. . . . And I never will be."

Dayir brought his whip down heavily on the girl's shoulders.

"You won't, eh?"

"You fiend!" cried Maken, recoiling from the blow and glancing in mute appeal to her friends.

Darmen was the first to spring to her aid. In an instant he was between her and Dayir and before the latter knew what was happening the whip raised to strike had been torn out of his hand.

"Stop, shameless one!" cried the young man.

"Out of my way!" yelled Dayir. "I'll trample the whole lot of you."

Noticing Abish approaching, he added with a sneer:

"You think yourself safe under Abai's wing. Know then that God himself will not be able to protect you. I'll grind you to dust!"

With these words he turned his horse and galloped off.

It was on the night of that alarming encounter that Maken and Darmen opened their hearts to each other and took the decision that had now led them into such deadly danger.

And now lying wide awake beside Maken, Darmen was recalling the dawn of his love at the Keregetas summer encampment. How much trouble and anxiety this love of his had caused his friends! Darmen was especially cast down by the thought that he had disturbed the peace of Abai. Yet what else could he have done but take refuge in the town? In the steppes he was threatened with the law of *bais* which would have forced Maken to marry Dayir, taken Darmen's cattle away from him and driven him destitute from his native village. Or still worse, they could both have been murdered, as Dayir had threatened. Darmen.

¹*jigit*—skilled horseman.

heaved a deep sigh. The prospects looked gloomy indeed and were it not for the help of their friends their position would have been desperate. He thought of Abish, and how his dearest and most loyal friend had hurried to the waterfront to offer his help. He remembered how Abish had comforted him on that unforgettable night at Keregetas, foreseeing the trials and ordeals the young lovers would have to experience.

"Never mind, Darmen!" he had said, "I know how reluctant you are to involve your friends in your troubles, and to distress Abai-aga. But, believe me, my father and I will support you at all costs, and we shall never reproach you. I am certain that Magish and Kakitai feel as I do. So do not hesitate to carry out your resolve!"

Abish had promised to tell his father all that had happened upon his return to town. Recalling his conversation with Abai the previous evening, Darmen understood that Abish had kept his promise. Abai knew everything and was ready to do everything in his power to help the young lovers. Although he did not say it in so many words, his advice to cross the Irtys in Seil's boat, to go into hiding in the town and seek out Abish and get him to write the petition showed that he had shouldered the responsibility for the fate of the fugitives.

Abai-aga and Abish will not desert us, Darmen thought, and a great peace filled his soul.

2

The next day Korabai and Dayir were already prowling about the streets of the waterfront settlement, examining every house. They had put up in the home of an acquaintance who lived next door to Aben in a small house surrounded by an old dilapidated fence.

The previous night, the mistress of the house, an inquisitive old woman, hearing a slight commotion in the neighbouring yard had gone outside and peered through a hole in the fence into Aben's courtyard. All that she saw and heard that night she reported to her lodgers. There could be no doubt—the runaways were there next door. Korabai and Dayir at once passed on the good news to their accomplices hiding in various parts of the waterfront settlement, and set up a watch over Aben's house and courtyard.

The hours passed. Korabai and Dayir lay motionless with their eyes glued to the holes in the fence, but silence reigned in the house of Aben. At last the door opened and Ayisha came out, and a few minutes later Muha and Almagambet rode into the yard, tied up their horses and followed Ayisha into the house.

Aben's guests were finishing their breakfast when Ayisha, who was sitting by the samovar near the door, heard a suspicious noise outside.

With a cry she rushed to the outside door and shot the bolt.

"The villains are here already!" she cried. Hardly were the words out of her mouth than there came a furious hammering at the door. Ayisha quickly pushed the samovar against the stove, went over to Maken and put her arms pro-

tectingly around the frightened girl, while the men armed themselves with whatever they could find.

"Open the door before I break it down!" roared Dayir. "Or expect no mercy from me!"

"We'll murder the whole lot of you!" screamed Korabai.

The attackers, of whom there were evidently no small number, threw themselves against the door which soon began to creak on its rusty hinges. Abdi gripped the heavy birch club which but yesterday he had used to grind tobacco. Aben had armed himself with an iron pole-pin from the cart; the powerful Muha had an axe ready, and Darmen, a copper pestle. Only the puny, faint-hearted Almagambet who relied more on the help of Allah than on his own feeble powers rushed about the room with a look of terror on his face, his trembling lips moving in prayer.

With a crash the outer door finally gave way under the pressure of the attackers. In another moment the ruffians would be upon them. Aben decided to go over to the offensive—he slipped off the catch and flung the door open wide.

With wild shouts Korabai and Dayir rushed in, laying about them with their whips and clubs. But Dayir's whip encountered Aben's iron pole-pin and a blow from Abdi's heavy club knocked down Korabai and he crawled out of the room, followed by Dayir, holding a broken arm and bellowing curses and threats. The other five men armed with only their horsewhips lost their nerve when they saw the primitive but formidable weapons of their adversaries. Aben, Abdi and Muha emboldened by their initial victory, chased them out of the house into the courtyard. As they reached the gate a kick from Abdi sent Dayir sprawling on the ground where he lay for a few moments groaning and cursing.

In the meantime Darmen dragged the trembling Almagambet over to his horse and helped him into the saddle.

"Go to Daniyar and bring Abish and Kakitai here as fast as you can! You aren't much use here anyway!"

He opened the gate and Almagambet cantered off.

While all this was taking place in Aben's house, Abish and Kakitai were attending to Maken's petition. They had been to the office of the uyezd chief and were now at the town court. Abish had gone in to see the chairman of the court, leaving Kakitai outside on the steps of the building. It was here that Almagambet found him.

"Oi-bai, what are you doing here!" he shouted at the top of his voice. "Our people are being murdered at the waterfront! Hurry if you want to find them still alive!"

Kakitai paled and dashed up the steps, calling to Almagambet to wait for him.

At that moment Almagambet was surprised to see Baimagambet coming towards him. By the dark look on his face Almagambet could see he had brought ill tidings.

"I have been to Daniyar," he said. "He told me to go and look for Abish in the court."

Baimagambet was an extremely uncommunicative man. Not for nothing did people call him Abai's "secret chest." Not even to Abai's wife Algerim, did he pass on a single word he chanced to hear his master say. Almagambet knew that it was useless to try and get any more information out of him.

Within a few minutes Abish and Kakitai came out of the court-house.

"What news do you bring from my father?" Abish asked when he saw Baimagambet.

Baimagambet took a folded letter out of his breast pocket and handed it to Abish. Kakitai stood next to Abish and they read the brief note together. Then Abai informed his son of his latest quarrel with Urazbai and warned him of the danger threatening Darmen and Maken. He anxiously enquired where the young people were staying and suggested that they seek refuge with some Russian family without delay. "It will be safer for them there than in a Kazakh home," he wrote. "As I wrote you in my last letter it is our duty as friends of the young people to do everything we can to save their lives. . . ."

The letter ended with these words, written in a faltering hand: "Today my sworn enemy insulted me and tried to frighten me. Now I have no choice but to take up the challenge and fight the villain to the last drop of my blood."

What could have happened to arouse his gentle, quiet-tempered father to such anger, Abish wondered. When Baimagambet told him of the nocturnal visit of Yesentai and Seiseke Abish understood what a bitter cup of humiliation Abai had had to quaff, and his heart ached for his father and burned with hatred for his tormentors.

"Tell my father," he said, "that I shall do everything in my power to help my friends. I shall leave no stone unturned. But tell him to move quickly to town, for we shall sorely need his advice. . . ."

Baimagambet nodded and hurried down to the river where a boat awaited him. Abish, having heard Almagambet's incoherent account of the happenings in Aben's house, jumped into the carriage as he was, in full officer's uniform with his sword and swordknot. Kakitai whipped up Daniyar's black pacer and with Almagambet riding alongside they drove to the settlement at such speed that the passers-by stopped to stare in wonder.

It was a dreadful scene that met Abish's eyes at Aben's house. Household utensils, smashed crockery and blood-stained rags were strewn all over the courtyard. Ayisha, Aben and Muha lay on the floor senseless. Ayisha was the first to open her eyes.

"There were so many of them . . ." she groaned. "About forty. . . . They have just gone. . . ."

Abish bent over to Ayisha.

"Where are Darmen and Maken?"

"They carried them off in a cart . . ." Ayisha replied and fell back unconscious.

Abish realized that "they" were the friends and accomplices of Urazbai and Dayir. Having done their evil deed, Urazbai's jigits must now be making for the

steppe with all speed in an effort to cover up their traces. They must be overtaken at once.

"Stay here," Abish said to Almagambet. "Get the neighbours to come and help Ayisha and the men! Kakitai, we must go down to the river at once. There is not a moment to lose!"

Kakitai whipped his horse cruelly, but Abish kept urging him to go still faster.

At last the sparkling surface of the Irtysk came into sight. The ferry boat was just about to leave the shore. Abish's heart told him that Urazbai's men were on board. Tearing the whip out of Kakitai's hand he brought it down heavily on the horse's croup. Daniyar's pacer literally flew down to the water's edge. Abish jumped off the carriage at full speed, and ran on to the pier only to find that the ferry had already cast off. Without a moment's hesitation he leapt across the widening strip of water on to the boat.

To the excited onlookers it seemed that the brave young officer must surely fall into the water. But with his strong fingers he gripped the wooden railing of the boat and pulled himself up on to the deck. A quick glance over the passengers showed him his guess had been correct—Dayir and his jigits were there. But he saw no sign of Maken and Darmen.

He went over to the Tatar helmsman and in a firm voice ordered him to turn back to the shore. The passengers began to protest, but the Tatar obeyed the command, turned the ferry around and brought it up alongside the pier and made it fast.

Abish sprang ashore and shouted to the policeman on duty at the river bank, a huge fellow whom everyone called "Semiz-sary" or "Red Fatty," because of his powerful frame and fiery whiskers. Grasping his sabre, Semiz-sary hurried over in obedience to the summons and stood at attention before the officer.

"There is a band of criminals on board this ferry," Abish explained shortly. "They have caused bloodshed in the waterfront settlement and have kidnapped a young girl. No one is to be allowed to go ashore. Keep the ferry here at the pier. I shall hold you responsible. Understand?"

"Yes sir, your honour! No one is to go ashore, the ferry to be kept at the pier!" the policeman repeated, his eyes glued to the officer's face.

"I am Lieutenant Uskenbayev. I shall be back in an hour."

"Yes, your honour!"

Semiz-sary, with his hand belligerently on his sabre belt, took up a position beside the ferry. Abish jumped into the carriage.

"Back to town as fast as you can!" he cried to Kakitai.

Makovetsky, the uyezd chief to whom Abish had submitted Maken's petition, was a well-educated man of about 30 with a distinguished appearance and pleasant manners, very different from the usual run of tough, coarse-grained tsarist officials in the area. Being somewhat liberal-minded he was not averse to associating with the local population, was acquainted with Abai and thought well of his son. The young officer, with his good manners and his excellent Russian was a far cry from those ignorant and importunate steppe petitioners whom

Makovetsky had come to know so well in the course of his work in Semipalatinsk. And if Abish had taken up the defence of Maken and Darmen he was evidently doing so out of humane considerations, in protest against the barbarous steppe customs. And the fact that this educated young man sought the protection of the tsarist administration for the young lovers caused Makovetsky to regard him almost as a champion of the autocracy's power in the outlying regions of the Russian Empire, and he willingly promised Abai's son his support.

And now Abish had come to him again, although the excited young man who almost ran into his office was very different from the calm, reserved young officer who had visited him that very morning.

"What has happened, Lieutenant?" Makovetsky asked, rising from his chair. "What has brought you here again?"

The chief indicated a chair, but Abish without sitting down gave him a brief account of the raid on Aben's house and the kidnapping of Maken and Darmen.

"Forgive me, Mr. Makovetsky," he said, "but I was forced to exceed my authority and took the liberty of holding up the ferry on the Irtysh. I had no alternative. Otherwise the criminals would have escaped and taken the petitioner Azimova with them."

Makovetsky nodded understandingly.

"You did well," he said. "I shall give orders at once to Starchak, chief of the police department, to detain the ring-leaders, and to bring Azimova and Darmen here."

A half an hour later Starchak, accompanied by five mounted policemen, rode down to the riverside where much had been happening in Abish's absence.

As soon as he had left, Korabai backed by a group of irate traders had begun to make a fuss and demand that the Tatar ferryman take them across the river without delay.

"You just try!" shouted Semiz-sary, brandishing his sword. "You stay where you are."

Dayir then pulled a wad of banknotes from his pocket and waved them at the policeman. Under different circumstances Semiz-sary would not have withstood the temptation, but now he hesitated, remembering the infuriated young officer who had leapt on to the moving ferry. It was risky to trifle with a fellow like that! And so he shouted angrily to Dayir:

"You mind who you're talking to!"

Dayir put the money away and wishing to vent his rage on someone went over to the cart where Darmen and Maken lay trussed up. Raising his whip in his unharmed left hand, he was about to strike the helpless jigit when Abdi who was sitting beside the cart pulled out a long knife and hissed in fury: "If you touch them I'll run you through! I swear it, Dayir!"

Abdi's face covered with cuts and bruises looked so terrible and his eyes flashed with such hatred that Dayir slunk away. He and Korabai then began

to stir up the passengers, a good half of whom had taken part in the fighting in Aben's house. Together they tackled the policeman again.

"Let the ferry go! We have to get to the other side!"

"What do you mean by holding up a boatful of people!"

"We'll complain to the authorities!"

The crowd pressed close around the policeman and the boatman. Semizsary laid his hand on his sword:

"Get back! Get back!" he roared.

At that moment about a dozen burly men in workmen's clothes came running on to the pier, their heavy boots making a loud clatter on the wooden planking. They pushed their way through the crowd on to the ferry.

"Where's that bloodsucker Korabai?" yelled a lad with a pair of powerful shoulders. "Bring him here!"

Darmen seized Maken's hand.

"Look, those are the rivermen! There's Seit!"

He was not mistaken—they were Aben's comrades, the famous athletes and wrestlers. A half an hour before, Almagambet at Ayisha's request had run to Seit and told him how Urazbai's men had raided Aben's house. Seit had gathered his friends at once and they had hurried to the spot. Roused to fury by the awful spectacle there they had hurried down to the river for they knew that Korabai and Dayir would try to hide with their victims in the village across the river.

Korabai, who was no coward, came forward in response to the summons:

"I'm Korabai. What's the matter? Have I killed your father? Am I your sworn enemy or what?"

"Oh, so you're Korabai. . . ."

Seit seized the merchant by his thick beard and with one blow knocked out three of his front teeth. The blood spurted from Korabai's nose. Seit punched him again and again until he fell.

Pandemonium broke loose on board the ferry. Someone yelled: "Dondagul!"

This was a name known up and down the river. Dondagul was a thief and drunkard notorious for his extraordinary physical strength. It was said that he had once thrown an eight-pood bale of tea over a tall fence. This Dondagul had taken part in the second raid on Aben's house and had knocked out both Aben and Abdi. True, Aben had got in a few heavy blows with his club at the giant's head and shoulders, and he now sat on the ferry with his head gashed and bleeding and his neck swollen, dimly aware of what was going on around him. However, when he saw Seit beating up Korabai and heard his name called, he snatched up a club and rushed to the aid of the trader. Swearing, Dondagul made for Seit. Both men swung their clubs but Seit struck first, the blow caught Dondagul on the arm and his club slipped from his hand. Groaning with pain, he fell heavily to the ground and crawled away to the shelter of the nearest cart.

When police chief Starchak arrived with his men the loaders were tackling Dayir. The police chief soon had everything in order. Then on instructions from Abish who now arrived on the scene he freed Maken and Darmen. Korabai and

Dayir, more dead than alive, were dispatched to jail under police escort and the loaders were told to go home.

"And now cast off!" the police chief shouted to the ferryman. "And be quick about it!"

Before long the ferry with the crowd of subdued jigits touched the opposite shore, where a noisy and impatient band of ruffians eager to take part in tracking down the fugitives was waiting. It was headed by the one-eyed Urazbai himself, who had come here with Seiseke and *khalf*¹ Sharifzhan, the latter distinguishable among the crowd by his white turban. The jigits, among whom were traders from the village and men from the steppes, rode right on to the ferry where they came at once upon Dondagul and his gang, all looking very much the worse for their encounter with the loaders. Before the ferry had cast off again Urazbai and his men already knew all the details of the happenings on the other side of the Irtysh. At the news of Korabai's and Dayir's arrest Urazbai flew into a rage.

"I had one sworn enemy, and now his cub has grown up to stand in my way," he growled. "An officer, kowtowing to the authorities. . . . But wait, I'll show him!"

Urazbai did not know where the fugitives had gone or where to begin looking for them. As soon as he reached the town landing he hurried to his friend Samalbek Dospanov, who served as Makovetsky's interpreter. A Kirghiz who had settled in Tobykty, this man had given Urazbai useful advice on more than one occasion and had helped him to establish ties with all the Kazakh interpreters in the public and district courts, in the state bank and in the governor's office. To such a useful man one did not grudge a fat mare for the slaughter in winter and a good measure of *kumys*² in summer. . . .

In the meantime Abish, Darmen, Maken, and police chief Starchak were waiting in the office of the uyezd chief. Makovetsky was receiving some town officials. As soon as his visitors had gone, he invited Starchak to come in and report. The police chief gave him a detailed account of what had happened in the waterfront settlement and on the ferry; he declared that Dayir and Korabai were to blame for everything, and complained that they had insulted him, calling him a lickspittle and a bribe taker.

The uyezd chief ordered the case of the armed assault to be turned over at once to the court. He then received Abish who came in accompanied by Maken and Darmen.

Makovetsky regarded the beautiful girl and her young man with undisguised curiosity.

"Please ask Azimova," he said turning to Abish, "whether she does not wish to take back anything contained in her petition addressed to this office? Has she not changed her mind after what happened today?"

¹*khalf*—religious scholar, graduate of the Moslem religious school (madrasah).

²*kumys*—a fermented liquor prepared from mare's milk.

Before Abish could translate Makovetsky's question, Samalbek Dospanov, who had already spoken with Urazbai, came into the room. At the sight of the interpreter, Abish bowed to him and said:

"Now that Mr. Dospanov has come, permit me to turn over the interpreting to him."

Makovetsky appreciated Abish's gesture—the young officer clearly wished to preserve complete impartiality in the investigation. The chief nodded to Samalbek, inviting him to take up his duties.

In reply to Makovetsky's question, Maken said in a quiet level voice, carefully choosing her words:

"*Taksyr*, I have suffered a great deal and I have come to beg you to give me your protection. I do not repudiate the petition I submitted to you yesterday and have nothing to add to it. I wish of my own free will to wed this jigit. His name is Darmen and he wishes to marry me. I beg you to protect me from the evil men who are persecuting us."

The girl spoke slowly, pausing now and again to wipe away her tears with her handkerchief.

Samalbek faithfully translated all that Maken said. He was evidently embarrassed by the presence of Abish who knew Russian as well as he knew Kazakh. When Samalbek finished speaking, Makovetsky turned to Abish for confirmation of the correctness of the translation. Abish nodded his head.

"Mr. Uskenbayev," said Makovetsky, "I wish to draw your attention to one circumstance. Once Azimova's petition has reached the authorities it will of course receive our attention. But do not forget that all such cases are usually decided according to the steppe laws, according to the Sharia. This is the first instance in my experience of a Kazakh girl seeking the protection of the laws of the Russian Empire. I believe that Maken Azimova is the first woman who has embarked, so to speak, on the path of struggle for the emancipation of the women of the East. Your intervention in this affair, Lieutenant, is evidence of your humanity and deserves the highest praise. However, kindly explain to Azimova and her bridegroom that it is not I, the uyezd chief, who will examine her petition and decide her fate. Cases of this kind are handled by the district court. The court will investigate the case and hand down its decision on the basis of the evidence."

Abish asked the chief to turn over Maken's case to the court as soon as possible and Makovetsky promised to bring the matter personally before the chairman of the court that same day.

Abish thanked the uyezd chief and he and his young friends left the office.

On the advice of Samalbek, Makovetsky decided to receive also the opposing side in the case—Urazbai, Seiseke and the khalfe Sharifzhan. When Abish in his officer's uniform came out of the chief's office, Urazbai, dropping behind Seiseke and the khalfe stepped in front of him and muttered through clenched teeth:

"You, young fool! You risk your position by interfering in private feuds. I know it's your father's doing, but take care! You may live to regret this."

Abish looked with distaste at the one-eyed bai whose face mirrored all his vices and ugly passions. He remembered the injuries this man had done to his father and the bloody doings in the home of Aben, and his young heart swelled with anger.

"I wish no harm to anyone," he said sharply, "but I shall always fight those who sow evil! I know how to curb and punish a villain without my father's help. Bear that well in mind, Urazbai!"

With these words Abish turned on his heel and walked out of the office after Darmen and Maken. They found their friends waiting for them outside, and together they made their way through the crowd of Urazbai's accomplices. Both sides preserved a heavy, tense silence, a single word would have been enough to set off another orgy of bloodshed. . . .

Makovetsky's interview with Urazbai was brief.

"I cannot decide Azimova's case," the chief declared. "It will be examined by the court. I was obliged to intervene because of the violence committed in this town and I am responsible for maintaining order here. You will have a chance to present your side of the case in court. The court will decide."

Urazbai knew Makovetsky. The uyezd chief had visited the aul during the elections of the volost chief and had shown himself to be quite incorruptible, a rare thing among the tsarist officials. A man of this sort had to be handled carefully.

"All that the chief has said is correct from beginning to end," Urazbai said respectfully. "If the law finds us guilty we must be punished. We agree to that. But I have one request which I believe neither the chief nor the court will refuse."

Makovetsky glanced questioningly at Urazbai.

"The investigation will not be finished in one day, it will take some time," Urazbai went on. "Where will the runaway girl be during this time? With the jigit who kidnapped her and who will of course make her his wife? Of what use then will be the court investigation? Let your court decide the issue, chief, but from this hour do not allow the girl and the jigit to be together. You have put two of our men, Dayir and Korabai, into prison. While the investigation is in progress, let Maken and Darmen too sit in prison. They must not be together. If you want justice done you must separate Darmen and Maken!"

Urazbai's demand that the girl and her lover be separated until the trial ended struck Makovetsky as just. However, he flatly refused to send them to prison, declaring that there were no grounds for such a step.

That afternoon, when all the offices in Semipalatinsk were already closed, the district court was the scene of unusual activity. The street in front of the court-house was crowded with Kazakhs from the other side of the river. Seil, the boatman, had brought Abai and Baimagambet over and after hauling his boat ashore had followed them to the court for he was curious to see "how all this would turn out."

Urazbai when he saw Abai could not control his anger and in a voice that could be heard all over the street he shouted:

"You started the fire and now you want to spread it! Go on, burn everything, Abai! Burn, destroy!"

"A fire, you say?" Abai too raised his voice. "Not all fires are calamities!"

"What do you mean?" cried Urazbai. "A fire is a blessing, perhaps?"

"Fires that destroy harmful weeds, dried-up roots and rotten stumps are indeed a blessing. Such fires only cleanse the earth, make room for the lush green grass to grow and new shoots to spring forth. But you, Urazbai, are familiar only with evil; all that is good and useful is alien to you."

A ripple of amusement passed through the crowd, cutting Urazbai to the quick. He was about to retort, but changed his mind and hastily withdrew.

In the meantime people continued to flock to the district court. It was a noisy, motley crowd—small shopkeepers, rivermen, factory workers, handicraftsmen, steppe folk who had come to the market. The traders Seiseke, Hassen and Zhakip had spread the news around town of the forthcoming sensational trial and a string of fashionable carriages with the town's leading merchants arrived. The mullahs, khalfes, karis, the overgrown madrasah scholars and elderly *shakirds* came too. They kept in the background but were prepared at any moment to give battle to those who had violated the faith and ancient custom by allowing a Russian court to decide the case of a woman who had dared to defy the law of her fathers. The Sharia alone had the right to decide such matters! Allah's curse was upon them, let the people themselves punish the law-breakers. In their blind fanaticism these religious bigots were no less blood-thirsty than Urazbai himself. The case of the runaway bride had aroused the interest also of the educated Kazakh officials who that day filled the lobbies of the district court. The rest of the Kazakhs did not venture to set foot inside the building.

In the spacious hall on the second floor of the building Abai found Abish, Kakitai, Darman, and Daniyar waiting for him. He was much surprised not to find Maken with them. He learned that the uyezdz chief had conceded Urazbai's request and at his orders Maken had been taken to the room set aside for prisoners awaiting sentence.

The crowd buzzed with excitement. Would the court undertake to examine the case of the runaway bride or would it be turned over to the court of the bays to be judged according to the laws of the Adat and the Sharia? This was the question on the lips of everyone, both within and without the court building. It was known that the well-known Abai had interceded on behalf of the girl, and not only he, but his son Abish, the army officer, as well. The district court could not but take heed of the patronage of two such worthy men, some averred. Others, on the contrary, maintained that while Abai was of course a venerable man, the Russian court was not competent to decide Moslem affairs.

In the meantime the chairman of the court was discussing with his colleagues what was to be done about the Azimova case. It involved a great many complex problems and much caution and tact was required in handling it. Since none of the judges wished to assume responsibility in this delicate affair it took them

until evening to arrive at a unanimous decision. When at last the petitioner was brought into the court-room, to which only a few spectators had been admitted, the chairman announced that the district court "by way of exception," had decided to examine the case of Azimova who had fled from the steppes and had sought the protection of the laws of the Russian Empire.

"In the interests of the case," said the chairman, "Maken Azimova will remain in town under police surveillance until the hearing is over, so that she shall not be able to associate with either of the opposing sides. The court has thus decided that until a final decision is handed down Azimova will stay in the home of the district court interpreter Alimbek Sarmanov."

Thus ended that exciting day which began with the bloody battle in the house of Aben.

The lives and future of Maken and Darmen now depended wholly on the Russian administration officials who themselves were somewhat uneasy about having meddled in this unusual affair. It was the first case of its kind ever to have been handled by the Semipalatinsk district court and no one could predict how it would end.

The following morning the mullahs, inspired by Urazbai and Seiseke, came to the chairman of the court and handed him a petition on behalf of the Semipalatinsk Moslem clergy written in perfect calligraphic handwriting.

"Disputes concerning the marriage and divorce of Moslem women can be settled only by the Sharia," it read. "Only the *imams* of the mosques, the pastors of the Moslem flock, have the right to decide the case of Azimova. Hitherto the Russian court has not interfered with our ancient customs governing marriage, the payment of kalym and the rights of *jesir*. We ask the Russian court to turn over the case of Azimova to the *bais* who will examine it in accordance with the laws of our ancestors."

Other influential people, Moslem priests, merchants, and wealthy citizens wrote similar petitions to the court.

But the supporters of Maken and Darmen were not wasting time. They insisted that the case be tried by a Russian court. The need for this was convincingly demonstrated in a statement by Artillery Lieutenant Uskenbayev, one of the principal witnesses in the case.

"Azimova is the first Kazakh woman who has appealed to the Russian administration and Russian justice for help and protection. To refuse her would discredit the administrative and judicial bodies of Semipalatinsk. The bloody battles which occurred in connection with the Azimova case did not take place in some remote corner of the steppes beyond reach of our administration, but here in the gubernia town, the residence of the Governor General himself, and the facts were brought to the attention of the legal authorities. It would be a grave mistake to refuse to investigate this scandalous case and allow it to be tried under the laws of Islam. Such an action would be a blow to the prestige of the court

and the entire administration of the town. There has so far been no mention of the Azimova case in the central newspapers, and the Minister of the Interior, the Minister of Justice and the Senate have not yet heard about it. Any hesitancy on the part of the local authorities in offering protection to the first Kazakh woman who desires to be tried under the laws of the Russian Empire will hardly meet with the approval of our government. . . .”

The hint contained in this statement by an officer of the Russian Army that the whole unsavoury affair might become public property through the press was calculated to impress those of the Semipalatinsk officials who trembled for their positions.

The document had been drawn up on Abai's advice with the assistance of his good friend, an exiled Russian revolutionary, Fyodor Ivanovich Pavlov. Abai himself paid a visit to his friend for this purpose. At Pavlov's request his friend, an exiled student, collected detailed evidence from the waterfront workers who had witnessed the assault by the accomplices of Urazbai and Dayir on Aben's house and the kidnapping of Maken and Darmen. Depositions bearing the signatures of Seil, Aben, and other literate loaders and factory workers and the tribal seals and thumb-prints of those who could not read or write, were submitted to the court. At Pavlov's advice depositions were taken also from the boatmen who had ferried the fugitives across the Irtysh. Alexandra Yakovlevna, Pavlov's wife, who being a doctor, had treated Aben, Ayisha and the other victims of the raid, gave the court a written statement describing the wounds inflicted on them during the fighting.

In the meantime poor Maken, torn from her friends and kinsmen, was alone with her anxious thoughts. She did not know what the future had in store for her and what misfortunes still awaited her. It was not by chance that the judges had chosen the court interpreter Alimbek Sarmanov to act as her gaoler. He was the most likely candidate for the job. In the first place he had an unblemished reputation as a politically reliable official, as was witnessed by his rapid promotion and his two decorations. Secondly, he was not connected with the Tobykty tribe, and thirdly, Sarmanov's wife was a Tatar and hence Maken Azimova was safe from the influence of her steppe kinsmen.

Obedient to his superiors, Alimbek Sarmanov willingly agreed to accept the guardianship of Maken, the more so since the chairman of the court assigned the sum of 50 kopecks a day for her upkeep. Fifteen roubles a month! For such a reward Alimbek would have been willing to keep Maken in his home for ever. Moreover, he had no need to fear that his ward would escape or be kidnapped, for police chief Starchak on orders from the court had assigned two policemen to stand guard over Alimbek's two-storey house in the Tatar quarter. Alimbek, a taciturn, unsociable man led a solitary existence. His neighbours never visited him and no outsiders were permitted to set foot inside his yard. Being a zealous official and a blockhead to boot he looked down on his fellowmen and would have nothing to do with his kinsmen from the auls. His wife, too, had no love for visitors from the steppes and had long since discouraged them from coming to her house.

Alimbek applied himself to his new duties with his customary zeal. In order to make things quite clear from the start he declared that not only would he forbid Maken's relatives and friends to see her, but would not even allow Abai to cross his threshold. Abish made an attempt to come to an understanding with the interpreter through Daniyar who knew him well. But Alimbek even refused to receive Daniyar.

3

In the meantime the day of Abish's departure for the town of Verny was approaching.

On graduating at the Mikhailovsky Artillery School in St. Petersburg, he had been given the rank of lieutenant and sent to the Turkestan military region for service at the "Asiatic outpost of Russia." Before leaving for Semipalatinsk he had been promised an appointment in Semirechye, and now an official paper had arrived ordering Lieutenant Uskenbayev to report to the field artillery unit in the town of Verny—Alma-Ata. It was hard for Abish to leave Semipalatinsk with the fate of his dear friends still undecided.

It was at this time that Abai took up his quarters in the town proper. The case of Maken Azimova had caused him no little trouble and anxiety. His heart was particularly heavy that autumn. He did not confide his forebodings to anyone, and it was only in those hours when he sat with his pencil and pad that he gave vent to his innermost thoughts and feelings. He wrote a number of inspired poems in this period, and a prose parable "Kara-sez" expressing his reflections on life.

Now that Abish had received his appointment and was due to leave for Alma-Ata any day, Abai wished to see as much of him as possible. They usually spent the evening hours together, but today Abai had sent Baimagambet to his son in the morning asking him to come as early as he could. When Abish arrived at his father's house he found two khalfes there—Sharifzhan and Yunusbek. As he learned later, they had been sent to Abai by the leaders of the city clergy.

These khalfes were secret accomplices of Urazbai. It was they who had negotiated with Makovetsky on behalf of the Moslem community and had tried to bring pressure to bear on him. They had literally haunted the government offices, filing depositions to discredit the witnesses for the defence. And now that all their efforts had proved of no avail they had decided on a flanking manoeuvre and had turned up unexpectedly at Abai's apartments. Sharifzhan on entering had spread out his palms and begun to recite a prayer. When he finished, he introduced himself. Abai knew his name only too well from the time of the cholera epidemic. And now this scoundrel had dared to cross his threshold uninvited!

"So you are the khalfe Sharifzhan who sows discord and weaves intrigues against honest people while you sit there in your mosque?" Abai said with unconcealed distaste.

This accusation flung in his face disconcerted Sharifzhan somewhat, but making a show of treating his host with the deference due to his venerable age, he murmured:

"Oh, mirza Abai, how can you accuse me of such things! You are really too hard on me!"

But since Abai continued to regard him with a wrathful gaze, Sharifzhan abandoned the attempt to broach the subject of the Azimova case, and decided to let Yunusbek do the talking. Accordingly he retreated behind the broad back of his companion.

But even Yunusbek, a master of religious argument, famed for his eloquence and well practised in diverse tribal disputes, was disconcerted by the cold welcome they had received. Moreover, brazen as he was, for some reason he always felt uneasy in Abai's presence. But he could not go without attempting to carry out the important mission entrusted to him. And so he began to repeat in a flat voice all that he had told the Russian officials in the course of his rounds of the different government offices. He ended his incoherent harangue by referring to the imam and the grace of Allah.

"Abai-mirza," he said in the tone of one performing a painful duty. "Everywhere and in all ages the foundation of the Moslem community has been the symbol of faith which the people identified with the name of the head of the community. But now, alas, faith is on the decline. You are the recognized mentor of our people and yet you openly prefer the Russian law to the law of Islam. Weigh your action on the scales of your honour and conscience, think of the example you are setting to the righteous, and what a baneful influence you exercise on our ignorant folk. All Moslems are now awaiting with tense interest the decision in the case of these who have violated the Sharia and our steppe customs, and we expect that you will cease to give your support to these wicked people in the name of our faith and the customs of our fathers."

Abai regarded the speaker with detached curiosity. This puny khalife with his pale-pink complexion, his neat little reddish beard and moustache combined the cruelty of the steppe bai with the cunning and treachery of the mullah. By calling Abai "the recognized mentor of the people," and addressing him as a pillar of the Moslem faith, Yunusbek evidently thought to disarm the poet completely.

As he listened Abai's curiosity soon gave way to a feeling of annoyance—why must he listen to these insolent speeches, dictated moreover by such base motives?

But before he had time to frame a worthy retort to Yunusbek, Abish entered the room. Abai answered his son's greeting and, indicating a place by his side with a nod, he turned to the khalfes.

"You have deemed it necessary to intervene in the case of Maken Azimova," he said. "Let us assume that this is indeed necessary for the sake of Islam. Yes, Islam, and not the faithful. But why then do you speak of conscience and honour? Why all these lies and hypocrisy?"

"Lies?" Yunusbek exclaimed widening his eyes in feigned surprise.

"Yes, lies!" said Abai, and before the khalife could say another word, he went on:



Morning

Semyon Chuikov (Kirghiz S.S.R.)

"You, servants of the mosques, imams and khasrets, were the first to run to the Russian officials, to men of another faith to look for protection for Islam. You flattered and fawned upon these infidels, you crawled before them and demeaned yourself in every way in order to thrust your complaints and petitions on them. Yes, you yourself Yunusbek no doubt have just been grovelling before them, and now no sooner do you cross my threshold than you proceed to defame and abuse them. What is that if not the most disgusting hypocrisy, the most shameful deception? Yet you speak on behalf of the Tatar and Kazakh population of this town, on behalf of the thousands of Moslems in this community and their clergy the ishans, the imams, khalfes, khasrets, mullahs, muezzins, and shakirds who have acted in league with you. Miserable, despicable liars and hypocrites! I blush for the mosque that has taught you such base deception, for our religion which you dishonour by your unworthy behaviour!"

As the words of scorn poured from Abai's lips the two khalfes felt as if they were being seared by the scorching fires of hell.

Abish saw that his father's anger was at white heat, as if Sharifzhan and Yunusbek personified at that moment all the evil that darkened his own life and the life of the Kazakh people. Concluding a long speech in which he ridiculed Yunusbek's theological sophistry, Abai said, his voice rising higher and higher:

"You quote from the holy books to convince me of the need to destroy, to stamp out the life of a young, innocent, unhappy girl! You want to involve me in this criminal affair. What is my answer to that? Accursed be your imams in whose name you have come to me, you who barter your conscience! Go back to them and tell them what I have said. . . ."

The khalfes looked at each other in consternation, but Baimagambet came to their assistance by throwing the double doors wide open. And the two visitors, muttering prayers, hastily withdrew.

For several minutes after they had gone Abai sat with his eyes closed, struggling with the wrath that seethed in his breast, his fingers clutching convulsively on his pencil. At last he grew calmer.

"I want to write down all that I said to them," he said.

This reminded Abish of the work to which his father had been repeatedly returning during these past months. On more than one occasion Abish had read the notes in his thick notebook, and he now felt constrained to speak of them to his father and dispel some doubts that had assailed him.

"Father, may I ask you to explain some entries in your book that are unclear to me?"

Abai looked at his son with tender encouragement. The firm spiritual friendship that had developed between them was a source of great joy to the poet. Abish had often amazed his father by the depth and maturity of his thinking.

"In some of your prose parables, your 'Kara-sez,'" said Abish, "and even in your reflections in verse you sometimes sound like a mullah delivering a sermon. You even use words that the simple uneducated Kazakh cannot understand. Is there any need for that? Of course, sometimes it is useful—for example when you are arguing with a mullah, as you did today. But is it worth while obscuring

the meaning of your writings, rejecting a language that would be understood by all Kazakhs for the sake of a few mullahs and hypocrites?"

Abai smiled.

"You say yourself that in order to expose the dishonourable thoughts and unworthy deeds of the mullahs I must speak their language," he replied. "Otherwise my words will not sound convincing to them."

"Yes, but is there any sense in sullyng your own splendid language for the sake of a handful of wretched mullahs and khalfes?" Abish insisted.

"You are mistaken, Abish," Abai replied. "They may be few in number, but they wield great influence among the people and they do immeasurable harm. You yourself have seen what they are capable of—if only by their persecution of Maken. We sometimes think that the town is a centre of enlightenment and knowledge and learning, that there is no place here for ignorance. But that is a grave mistake: it is here in the town that the ishans, imams, khasrets, khalfes and heads of the mosques and madrasahs have entrenched themselves. There are many schools in town, but there are many mosques too. The townsfolk sometimes remind me of a prisoner bound hand and foot by the chains of ignorance and languishing in a dungeon. . . . Strangely enough," Abai went on, "the townsfolk suffer more from the ignorant servants of the faith than the steppe dwellers. The fanatical appeals, the treacherous schemes, the sinister breath of slander and calumny are all born within the walls of the madrasahs and mosques and from there the poisonous fumes spread among the believers. It is in the towns that all manner of monstrous deeds are perpetrated in the name of religion."

This was a subject on which Abai felt most keenly.

"The proponents of Islam seek to turn every Moslem believer into a blind instrument for the attainment of their own base schemes. Living in Russia the mullahs teach the Kazakh people to be the enemies of their homeland. The hatred they preach for the infidels is spread by Moslem clergy in Kazan, the Crimea, in holy Bukhara, in Samarkand, in Cairo, Mecca and Medina, in Istanbul, Turkey of the Sultans where the tyranny of the days of the *Thousand and One Nights* still holds sway.

"The letters, newspapers, and sermons I sometimes receive from there all pursue a single purpose—to keep us and our descendants in the grip of darkness and ignorance. The Russian people among whom we live are depicted as horrible monsters. 'Shun the Russians, they are enemies of our religion. Do not trust them, be their enemies!' that is what Islam preaches today!"

Deep lines furrowed Abai's broad brow. Abish glanced at his father in amazement—never had he heard him voice his innermost thoughts with such passion and bitterness.

"Don't you see what they want me to do?" Abai asked. "They want me to forget that I, who began life as an ignorant villager, have become an educated man. They want me to renounce that ray of light amid the darkness of the steppes that illumined the path to Russian books and opened my eyes to the world. To listen to those who send me messages on behalf of Islam, I must become a modern dervish, another Sufi-Alliyar, I must debase myself, burn my own writings. I must

bend my head before the 'Appeal of the Islam Council' and denounce even you, my son, for having been educated in a Russian school. You see what awaits me if I submit to their will! They want to inject all Kazakhs with the poison of Islam and to use me as their instrument for this purpose. They want to hold our generation and all subsequent generations of Kazakhs in the fetters of ignorance. You say that they are but a wretched handful. Yes, they are not many, but how great is the harm they do!"

Abai reminded his son that it was not only the ishans, the mullahs and khalifes who befuddled the people. They were actively aided and abetted by men like Seiseke and Korabai, and by the steppe elders like Urazbai, all blind ignorant fanatics who had never opened a book in their lives.

His father's impassioned speech dispelled many of the doubts that had assailed Abish. In spite of his youth, he had seen a good deal of the world. Two years before he had been taken ill with tuberculosis of the glands—of which the scar he still bore on his neck was evidence—and had been sent south for a cure, first to the Crimea and later to the Caucasus where he had lived for several months. Besides this, the previous autumn, after receiving his appointment to the Turk-estan military area, he had made the long journey to Tashkent. The many places he had visited and the people he had met in the course of his travels had made a lasting impression on the young man, and he had often shared with his father observations he had made of the life of the Crimean Tatars, Caucasian mountaineers, and the people of Turkestan.

He could not help recalling his impressions as he listened to his father, and he realized that what he had seen during his travels merely confirmed what his father was saying. He had observed in those places he had visited that very same barbarous ignorance and religious fanaticism of which his father spoke. The Moslem believers lived there in a state of utter darkness and ignorance; there too the ishans and khasrets frightened the people away from Russian schools, made them enemies of Russian culture, and taught them to hate the Russians.

While at military school Abish had made friends with an intelligent young Tatar cadet from Kazan named Gizatulla who had told him a great deal about his own country. The lad had spoken with bitterness of the stone wall which the imams and khasrets had built between the Tatar and Russian peoples. The mosques and madrasahs, the fanaticism of Islam had closed the doors of learning to the Tatars. The mullahs had a horror of progressive Russian culture, they feared that it would prevent them from weaving their web of lies around the hearts of the Moslem faithful.

Abish spoke of this now to his father. Their talk lasted far into the night.

It was hard for Abai to part with his son, for the separation this time promised to be prolonged. Who could tell if they would ever meet again? And so, father and son made the most of the few precious days they still had together. In the month of their life together in Semipalatinsk they had advanced side by side along the dangerous road of struggle against the dark forces. This had brought a new element into their relations, and once, after a long talk with his son, Abai said:

"Abish, my dear son! You and I not only have ideas and dreams in common, this year we have been comrades-in-arms as well, and it has been a great joy to me to have discovered in you a staunch fighter in a just cause."

Abish's pale face flushed at the praise—he had sensed that his father was pleased with him but this was the first time he had heard it from Abai's own lips.

But much as Abish enjoyed his father's society, he had many friends of his own age in town who were deeply attached to him. Before his departure he spent several evenings with Darmen, Kakitai, Muha, the merry, sharp-tongued Utegelda, and the singer Almagambet. Today the young people met at Aben's place in the waterfront settlement where Darmen was staying.

Aben and his wife Ayisha, though they had suffered cruelly at the hands of Urazbai's gang, were still devoted to Darmen and had willingly taken him in to stay with them. Muha and Almagambet too had found shelter in the home of the hospitable loader.

Abish came to the waterfront with Kakitai and Utegelda. The young people were sitting at the low round table drinking tea when there was a knock at the door and Pavlov entered. He was a close friend of the Aben family. Aben and Ayisha were delighted to see him, and they treated him as an honoured guest.

"I am so glad you have come!" cried Abish, making room for Pavlov at his side.

Pavlov excused himself for intruding on the gathering saying that he had just dropped in for a brief visit and had come to see Aben on business. At the tea-table Pavlov engaged Abish in lively conversation and gave him to understand that he was following Maken's case with the greatest interest.

"Who keeps you informed?" Abish asked in surprise.

Pavlov smiled.

"Everything connected with Aben and his house is of interest to me," he said evasively. "My friend Markov began his career as a lawyer here. Although he is not a practising solicitor he drafted Maken's petition to the district court no worse than any lawyer. I must confess that for me too this case has been my first experience in legal matters."

Pavlov glanced at Aben, whose face bore the scars of recently healed wounds, and a faint smile rose to his lips. Abish noticed this and said:

"We are very grateful to you, but tell us, please, has your intervention in the case of this girl who fled to town from the aul any bearing on your programme of revolutionary activity?"

Pavlov, realizing that there was no hint of irony in this question, replied in the same vein: "Of course it has! Do you think the river workers would shed their blood for nothing! Why should they fight the bais if it was not part of our programme of action!"

And he laughed heartily.

"Then one might say that the river workers have contributed their share of physical force to the common cause?" Abish said in the same bantering tone.

"Certainly," Pavlov replied gravely. "We try to teach the workers to recognize their enemies at all times and under all circumstances. Our comrades Aben, Seit, and the others understood the true significance of the 'Azimova case' very well."

Aben, guessing what Pavlov was saying about him in Russian, chimed in the conversation at this point.

"Yes, Markov and Pavlov tell us that our worst enemies are the *bais*, the *volost* rulers, the traders, and officials," he said. "The workers here are beginning to speak openly of the misery they have suffered at the hands of the *bais* in the steppes and here in town as well. Pavlov and Markov are our true friends, we can be quite frank with them. They know what we want. They have taught us to know our enemies. And once you know your enemy, you know what to do!"

"The river folk have only been waiting for a chance to show their strength to the enemies," Pavlov said when Aben had finished speaking. "The Azimova case gave them that chance. I advise you, Abish, to hear what Markov has to say on this score. He has a whole theory about it. He has even written to his comrades telling them how the working class was able to make use of such a survival of medievalism as the kidnapping of a bride to recognize their class enemies."

Abish listened to Pavlov with great interest and was genuinely sorry when he rose as soon as the meal was over and took his leave.

After he had gone, Darmen at Abish's request took up his *dombra* and began to play. His sensitive fingers drew enchanting melodies from the soft-voiced instrument. But his listeners were waiting for him to sing, and Darmen sensing this, turned to Abish and said bitterly:

"I know you want me to sing to you. But there is only one melody that echoes in my heart just now and I would like Maken to be the first to hear it if fate permits me to see her again. Still you, Abish, are about to depart on a long journey and if I do not sing that melody now you will never know the thoughts that burden my soul." Darmen surveyed the little circle of friends with tenderness. "Maken is not with me, but her faithful friends are here. I shall open up my heart to you. You know the legend of *Sharken*. Remember what the young Zukul-Maken said to his wise friend Dandan when his brother, the warrior Shar-ken, was killed and he himself lay mortally wounded? 'My soul and my body are racked with pain. Speak to me that I might forget my anguish.'"

Darmen fell silent, lost in thought.

"I too shall seek forgetfulness in song," he added sorrowfully.

The others gazed with silent compassion at his handsome, fine-featured face, the thick eyebrows and the dark, now mournful eyes with the strange red lights in them.

The bard touched the strings of his *dombra* and began to sing, pouring out the pain that lay heavy upon him. The melody soared like a bird, telling of the vows of two young lovers and their resolve to fight for their happiness to the end. Now and again the listeners caught echoes of Abai's song "The Apple of My Eye" expressing the grief of two loving hearts forced asunder and burning with the undying flame of love.

Darmen sang of the bitter fate that had befallen Maken and himself and had made hunted fugitives of them; he sang of true friendship that is revealed in misfortune, of the brotherly help of Abish and Magish; he found kind words for all those who had risen to the defence of the lovers, he mentioned Muha, felled by a cowardly blow and lying in a pool of blood. . . . He brought a smile to his listeners' lips by poking good-natured fun at Almagambet and his terrors on the day of the raid.

"It's all right for you to laugh," said the embarrassed Almagambet. "But Korabai has a fist like a hammer! There would be nothing left of me if I had fallen foul of him!"

Aben and Ayisha laughed heartily at Almagambet's discomfiture.

The poet sang on and on to the accompaniment of the dombra, delighting his hearers by the unexpected turns of the melody, now sorrowful and sad, now sparkling with humour and gaiety. Now a note of pain sounded from the instrument as he sang of Maken as he had seen her in a dream, thrown into a bottomless pit, her cries harrowing his soul! "I am here beside you!" he wanted to shout to her but his lips suddenly refused to obey him. He wanted to jump down to join her, but his limbs were leaden, his feet seemed glued to the ground. . . .

As he sang, Ayisha who a moment before had been laughing gaily at his humorous snatches, now wept sorrowful tears. Abish could not tear his eyes from the inspired face of his friend, it seemed to him that in Darmen's farewell song he could hear faint echoes of the lovely ballads of the Russian poets.

Notes of pain and bitterness sounded in Darmen's last song in which he sang of Maken, a prisoner in the home of Alimbek. The implacable gaoler stood in the bard's path, preventing him from glancing if only for an instant at his beloved. The interpreter's home was worse than the bottomless pit, for not a single word of greeting from her lover reached the prisoner there.

What wiles and subterfuges Darmen and Kakitai had resorted to in the hopes of transmitting some word to Maken! The other day they had sent her a dress with amulets sewn into the collar. Would she guess that under the neatly-sewn collar lay a letter from Darmen written in infinitesimal handwriting?

Now the bard struck the final chord and laid aside his instrument. Silence fell. No one spoke, for each was reluctant to break the magic spell cast by the music. . . .

Abish was unable to wait for the court hearing of Maken's case, for a message came from Tashkent ordering him to report to Alma-Ata earlier than he had expected.

Taking leave of Darmen, Abish embraced him warmly and said: "I hoped to have been able to see with my own eyes all the obstacles to your happiness removed and you and Maken united for ever. But it cannot be helped. I am a soldier and hence not my own master."

And so Lieutenant Uskenbayev left for Alma-Ata.

The time dragged heavily for Darmen after the departure of his dearest friend. The cold autumn rains turned to snow, a thick layer of ice held the waters of the Irtysh in thrall, and still Maken was a prisoner.

Only once in the four months that had passed since the night when she and Darmen had crossed the river to Semipalatinsk in Seil's boat had Maken left the house of Alimbek, the interpreter. Accompanied by his wife Salima, her face hidden beneath the thick black veil worn by all Tatar women, she had been taken by sled to the investigator at the district court.

Alimbek himself had acted as the interpreter during the interrogation. Maken had repeated her previous testimony word for word.

More than a month had passed since that visit and now Maken was on her way to the courthouse again. It was a bright cold morning. Snow had fallen during the night and now it sparkled and shone in the sun. Maken inhaled the pure frosty air with delight and looked about her with lively interest at the streets flashing by the sled and the pedestrians in their sheepskin jackets and felt boots hurrying about their affairs.

As they alighted outside the courthouse Maken was amazed to see that the square in front of the building and even the adjoining streets were thronged with people. In spite of her thick veil Maken noticed that a large part of the crowd were dressed in the manner of the Tobykty clan. Nearest to the courthouse steps stood the bais in their heavy cloth coats with the broad fur collars, the town merchants in Tatar hats and fur coats lined with squirrel and racoon fur, and several mullahs in turbans.

But not a single friendly, familiar face did she see among all these people.

Salima holding her firmly by the arm, led her into the courthouse and up the staircase to the second floor. And suddenly Maken heard a familiar voice beside her. It was Almagambet.

"Courage, Maken!" he said in a low voice. "Your friends are here beside you. Abai-aga is here too!"

Abai-aga! The name was enough to suffuse her whole being with warmth and confidence.

In view of the unprecedented nature of the Azimova case, the district court had decided to conduct the hearing behind closed doors without the participation of either of the parties concerned. There was no prosecuting attorney, no defence lawyer, no witnesses, and no public. The entire proceedings were to be limited to the interrogation of Maken by the chairman and two members of the court.

Led by two court attendants, Maken entered the spacious room with its tall sculptured ceiling. Three men were seated behind a large table covered with green baize cloth. In the middle sat a large man with a bald head and a wide brown beard, in gold-rimmed spectacles and with gold buttons on his dark-green uniform. Maken at once guessed that this was the chief judge, the man who would decide her fate, and she hardly glanced at the other two seated on either side of him. Presently she noticed the interpreter, a pock-marked thickset Kazakh, standing beside the table, and the court secretary at a small desk apart.

Maken was confident that the court would protect her and hence the chief judge appeared to her to be a pleasant kindly man who would not do her any harm, and she felt calmer. Not that she had been afraid at any time since her flight, or even during the long months of her captivity. She wondered at this, and had often asked herself why it was that she felt no fear. Could it be that her reason was forsaking her, or that she was no longer capable of any feeling?

The truth was, however, that Maken was a brave, pure-hearted girl with a strong sense of justice. Now too, she was resolved to stand her ground to the last. "I shall die rather than give in," she told herself, clenching her fists.

"Come closer, please!" the chairman of the court said, beckoning to her.

He adjusted his gold-rimmed spectacles and examined with interest this young daughter of the steppes who was standing there facing the court. The interpreter translated his words to her and Maken, stepping carefully over the soft carpet advanced to the judge's table. Tall and slender, in her little embroidered cap covered with a light silken shawl, she looked very beautiful, and the chief judge examined her delicate, olive-complexioned face with undisguised admiration.

"Your name?" he enquired. Other questions followed: her age, were her parents living, could she read and write, and so on. As she watched the secretary faithfully recording all her answers as the interpreter translated them, Maken for some reason felt certain that all would end well. She even began to feel slightly amused at the chairman's questions.

Don't they know who I am yet? They have asked me the same questions and recorded my answers so many times before, she thought.

The chairman asked her why she had run away from Dayir. Maken replied briefly but firmly. She loved Darmen, she wished to marry him and would rather die than marry Dayir.

When Maken's replies were translated to him, the chairman turned to his colleagues and the three men conversed for a time in Russian. Maken could not understand what they were saying but watched them hopefully for some indication of how her fate was being decided. The chairman of the court was observing to his colleagues that "this Kazakh girl speaks well, she is intelligent, carries herself with dignity and obviously has nothing to hide."

The decision of the court was thereupon announced to Maken through the interpreter. It granted Maken Azimova the right to be the mistress of her own destiny.

Beyond that, however, the court feared to press the issue, and hence the settlement of the property interests involved, the return of the kalym was left to the Kazakh court to be decided on the basis of the regular legal practice.

But Maken was not interested in that part of the court's decision. As soon as she learned that the court denied Dayir, son of Shakar, the right to marry her by force merely on the strength of the kalym paid for her, Maken's heart brimmed over with happiness. Now she was free to choose the man she loved!

The news of the decision at once became known to the hundreds of people who thronged the building of the district court and the square outside it.

Although the crowd included many traders, aged shakirds, mullahs, and other supporters of Urazbai and Dayir, the sympathies of most were clearly with Maken and Darmen. The boatmen from both sides of the Irtys, petty artisans, Russian workers and especially the river workers and the poor folk from the steppe auls loudly acclaimed the court's decision, leaving no doubt as to which side the labouring folk supported in this struggle.

Maken was overjoyed. She tightly clutched the precious slip of paper which stated in Russian and Kazakh that Maken Azimova was free to marry the man of her own choice. The Russian law had given her its protection, the red seal released her for ever from Dayir!

"Oh, Abai-aga!" When she saw the man to whom most of all she owed her present triumph Maken's hands flew to her throat and tears of gratitude welled up in her eyes. She was ready to fall on her knees before him. But Abai himself approached her and held out his arms in paternal caress and warmly congratulated her.

She had not seen Abai for nearly half a year and he seemed to be younger and more radiant than ever. A proud smile played on his lips, his eyes shone with joy and kindness. True, there was a touch of silver—the inexorable mark of age—to be seen in his beard and moustache, but his gleaming white even teeth made his face look young and vigorous.

"May all our conflicts with our enemies end thus," he said to his companions Darmen and Kakitai.

Ah, here was Darmen! Pale with emotion, he came swiftly over to his bride and stopped short beside her, not daring to embrace her or even touch her hand in the presence of all these people. They merely stood gazing at each other in silence. . . .

But there were those among the crowd who looked at Abai with eyes full of hatred and malice. Yesentai nudged Urazbai who stood beside him:

"See how that Ibrahi swells with pride and conceit!" he hissed.

"Let him rejoice today!" Urazbai replied hoarsely, grinding his teeth. "The time will come when I shall repay him for this a hundred-fold!"

Abai officially informed the chairman of the court that all the property claims of Urazbai and Dayir in the Azimova case would be satisfied without dispute. In this way he knocked the last trump card out of the hands of Urazbai and Dayir and cut off their path to further deeds of violence.

Thus ended the case of Maken Azimova which was to be long remembered among the people by the name given it by the enemies "The case of the stolen bride."

Translated by Rose Prokofieva

Illustrated by Andrei Livanov

STRONGER THAN ROCK

Sea-blue steppes extend to the horizon.
Brightening the site, the sunbeams fall.
Clad in dusty overalls, a mason
Stands beside the partly-finished wall.

With his brawny hands the mason raises
Smooth-cut stones dyed crimson by the sun.
"Which," I asked the stone, "excels the other—
He or you—which is the stronger one?"

And the stone replied in accents humble
"Man is stronger, there can be no doubt.
It was he who hewed me from the quarry,
It was he who shaped and cut me out.

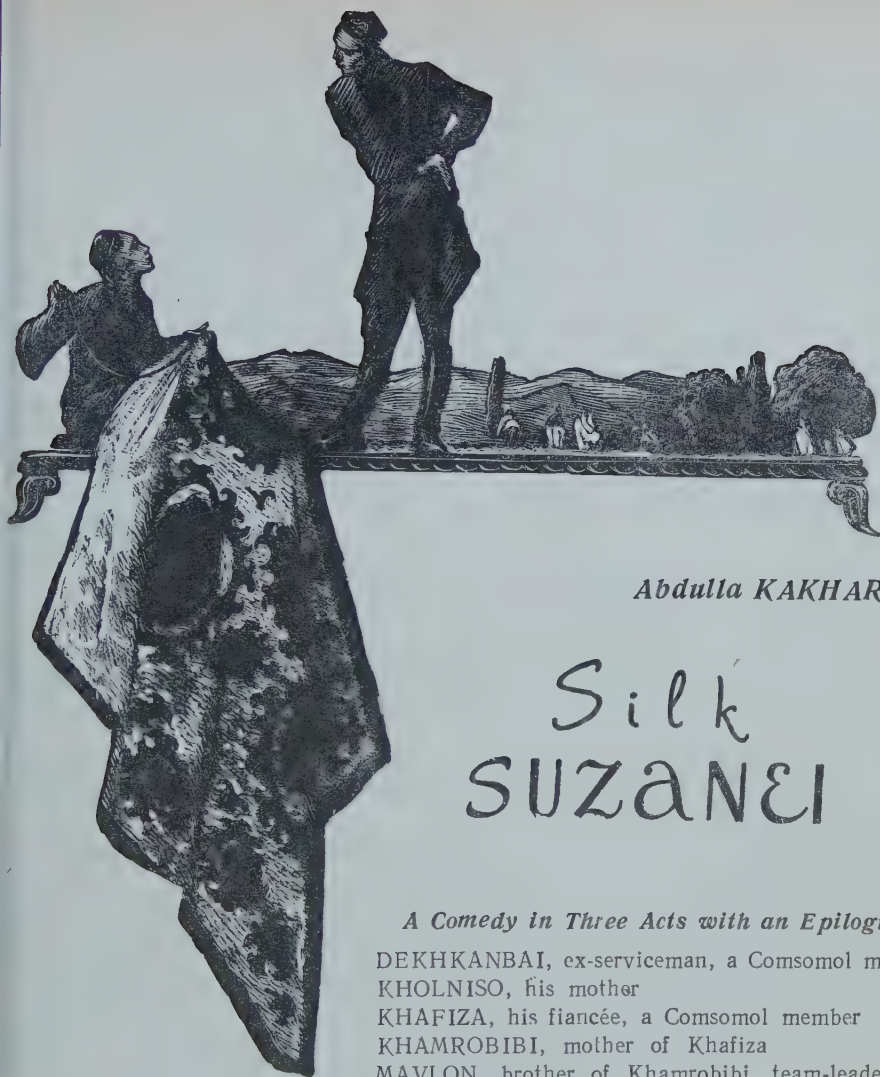
With his skilful hands today he rears me
Up into the heavens' lofty height,
Setting me above the pent-up river
Like a monument to human might.

I have heard the river will be harnessed
To illumine water, earth and sky.
Now I see the will of human beings
Is a hundred times as strong as I.

Do you wish to know the mason's purpose?
Would you like to learn about his aim?
He will turn the power of running water
Into swiftly-flowing liquid flame."

So replied the stone in admiration,
While the smiling mason carried on,
Rearing his magnificent creation
Up to where the sun in glory shone.

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg



Abdulla KAKHAR

Silk SUZANEI

A Comedy in Three Acts with an Epilogue

DEKHKANBAI, ex-serviceman, a Comsomol member
KHOLNISO, his mother
KHAFIZA, his fiancée, a Comsomol member
KHAMROBIBI, mother of Khafiza
MAVLON, brother of Khamrobibi, team-leader at a
kolkhoz in the Hungry Steppe
RAKHIMDJAN, chairman of the kolkhoz
ADILOV, Party organizer at the kolkhoz
KUZIYEV, ex-serviceman, a Comsomol member
SALTANAT, secretary of the kolkhoz management board
AMAN, younger brother of Dekhkanbai, a school-boy

The action of the play takes place in Uzbekistan in 1947-1948, the epilogue ten years later.

ACT ONE

A low mud wall divides the stage. On the left is Kholniso's yard, on the right, Khamrobibi's. There is a small gate in the wall. Both yards have verandahs giving on to them, and on the right, one window of Khamrobibi's house also looks into the yard. Along the back of the stage there is another mud wall, which separates the yards from the village street. Each yard has a broad gate leading into the street. In each yard, near the dividing wall there is a *suri*, a wooden bench covered with a carpet. Khamrobibi and Kholniso are sitting on their *suris*, cleaning cotton and singing softly.

KHOLNISO: If I remember rightly, deeply honoured Khamrobibi, you came in the other day after dinner and borrowed some rice for a pudding. Forgive my curiosity, but did the pudding turn out well?

KHAMROBIBI: Made from your rice, it could not have turned out badly. But I changed my mind and made a pilau for supper.

KHOLNISO: Pilau? All the better.

They go on singing.

KHAMROBIBI: The children have a Comsomol meeting today.

KHOLNISO: I know, neighbour dear.

KHAMROBIBI: Do you know what it is about?

KHOLNISO: Alas, dear neighbour, they never tell me these things.

KHAMROBIBI: I do hope they aren't late for it! Do you know the time?

KHOLNISO: No, dear neighbour. I have lost count of the time. My clock has stopped.

KHAMROBIBI: Really? I hope you won't consider me curious, dear friend, but may I ask you why your clock has stopped? Has it gone wrong or did you forget to wind it up?

KHOLNISO: Gone wrong? Why should it? Heaven forbid! I just forgot to wind it up this morning.

KHAMROBIBI: I never boast, Kholniso, that is not a fault of mine, as you know, but such a thing could never have happened to me. Forget to wind up one's clock! Do you remember when we first came to live here and Allah saw fit to ordain that there should be no mosque and no muezzin in the village to call us to prayer? It was then that I bought an alarm-clock, so that my late husband Gafur should not forget his morning and evening prayers. I consider forgetting to wind up one's clock as bad as forgetting the Allah. . . .

An alarm-clock rings in Khamrobibi's house.

There you are: seven o'clock! I'll go and tell Khafiza to hurry up.

KHOLNISO: I must tell Dekhkanbai too.

The old women go into their houses. A song is heard in the street and some young people go past.

VOICE FROM THE STREET: Khafiza! Dekhkanbai! Don't forget the meeting!

Khafiza runs out of the house. She is carrying a basket of silk threads and a *suzanei*¹ which she has evidently been embroidering.

KHAFIZA (*calling after the young people*): It's still early! We won't be long!

Aman comes out of Kholniso's house.

AMAN (*solemnly*): Salaam, Khafiza! My elder brother respectfully enquires after the state of your health, and with equal respect would have me inform you that he greatly values your precious time but that if you consent to wait for him he will be ready in ten minutes. (*Slyly*) He is shaving, Khafiza! He shaved this morning, and though his beard has not grown, he is shaving again. What could be the reason for that, Khafiza?

KHAFIZA (*in the same tone*): If you had a beard you'd understand. But you haven't, have you, Aman?

AMAN (*offended*): I may not have a beard, but I've been accepted for the Comsomol. I'm going to the meeting today too! Good-bye, Khafiza!

KHAFIZA (*stopping Aman*): Aman! Dear Aman! The meeting won't start for another hour yet!

AMAN: People who get there first are never late. (*Runs out.*)

KHAFIZA (*sits down on the suri and embroiders her suzanei. She begins to sing, softly at first, then louder*):

A girl in love, says the custom of old,
From the brightest of silks a suzanei shall make,
And here in my basket, shining red, blue and gold,
There's a rainbow of colours to take. . . .

Khafiza is still singing when Dekhkanbai comes out on to the verandah. He bends over a basin. He washes his face after shaving. At the sound of the song he turns round and accidentally knocks over a pail. Khafiza stops singing.

DEKHKANBAI: A curse on that pail! I've spoiled your song.

KHAFIZA: A song's like a bird. If you frighten it, it flies away! (*Pensively*)
Our girls used to sing that song during the war.

DEKHKANBAI (*jealously*): And you? Did you sing it too?

KHAFIZA: Who could I sing it to then? In those days I was only the girl next door to you. "Give my regards to Auntie Khamrobibi and her daughter Khafiza." Wasn't that how you used to write home?

DEKHKANBAI: So you haven't forgotten?

KHAFIZA: I have a good memory.

DEKHKANBAI: But you *were* only a little girl when I went off to the war. It was only when I came back, when I saw you here, on this verandah. . . .

KHAFIZA: I had just come in from the fields. My hair was untidy and I was all dusty and dirty.

¹ *suzanei*—an embroidered cloth which the Uzbek bride makes for her wedding day.

DEKHKANBAI: Khafiza! At that moment I regretted that I had not been born a poet, that I could not write like Ali Sir Neval:

"O thou of handsome face and laughter gay,
One glance and I shall never turn away. . . ."

KHAFIZA: Oh! 'Never turn away!' Remember how you turned away from me for a whole year, Dekhkanbai! You wouldn't even look at me!

DEKHKANBAI: It took me a year to catch up with your speed of work. I was ashamed. A man would rather die than be ashamed. But in a year. . . .

KHAFIZA: I know. You were afraid you wouldn't be earning enough to buy presents for the bride.

DEKHKANBAI: Why do you offend me? Is it just a matter of earnings? During the war you worked for yourself and for us, men at the front, but it wasn't just for money, was it? You got a government award. What for? For your great labour. . . .

KHAFIZA: Modesty is a virtue, but a man need not belittle himself. What about your awards? Two Orders of Glory. . . .

DEKHKANBAI: I value them greatly, for I won them at the front. But when I returned home it was peacetime. What does peace mean? Sitting in a tea-house admiring the reflection of your medals in the samovar? Old glory is like yesterday. People remember it but think of tomorrow. I thought of many things: of my work, of the fame of our kolkhoz, of how I should win your love, Khafiza. . . .

KHAFIZA (*tenderly*): You silly dear. So clever but silly. Even mother noticed before you did that I was in love with you. (*She blushes.*)

DEKHKANBAI: I am happy, Khafiza! I am very happy! We shall go out to the Hungry Steppe together. . . .

KHAFIZA (*looking round*): Tsh!

DEKHKANBAI (*quietly*): We'll announce it at the meeting today. . . . Do you know what I dream of being? I want to be like your uncle, like Mavlon! He's a wonderful man! And his cotton's wonderful! And he's got a wonderful niece.

KHAFIZA: It will be a long time before the niece is as good as her uncle. Fancy going off all alone like that to the Hungry Steppe.

DEKHKANBAI: The first to go! To conquer the barren salt marshes, to set us an example. And we young people, we Comsomol members, are going to follow in his footsteps. You and I together, Khafiza.

KHAFIZA: Tsh! Mother mustn't know anything until the meeting's over and everything's been decided.

DEKHKANBAI: My mother doesn't know anything yet either.

KHAFIZA: It'll be easier with Auntie Kholniso.

Khamrobibi appears on the verandah.

I wouldn't put it past mother to come and make a fuss at the meeting.

KHAMROBIBI: Khafiza! What's that you are saying about me, my dear?

KHAFIZA (*confusedly to Dekhkanbai*): There you are. . . . (*Runs into the house*).

KHAMROBIBI (*stopping Dekhkanbai*): Salaam, Dekhkanbai!

DEKHKANBAI: Salaam, Auntie Khamrobibi! (*At a loss*.) Is everything going well with you, auntie?

KHAMROBIBI: Thank you, Dekhkanbai. If only I didn't have so many worries. . . .

DEKHKANBAI (*alarmed*): What worries, may I ask, auntie?

KHAMROBIBI: Of course, I am an old woman and I never interfere. It wouldn't be the thing for an old woman to interfere in the affairs of the young, would it? So I keep quiet. It's hard for me, but I keep quiet.

KHAFIZA (*whispering to Dekhkanbai from the window*): Mother heard everything. . . .

KHAMROBIBI (*turning round*): My old ears hear badly but I'm not stone deaf. (*To Dekhkanbai*) I hear everything and I know everything, but I keep quiet. And I won't say a word to you, not a single word. . . . All I say is that if. . . .

KHAFIZA (*to Dekhkanbai*): I knew it. . . .

KHAMROBIBI: Yes. . . if the meeting begins at eight o'clock, those who want to get to it before it finishes, ought to leave home before it begins.

DEKHKANBAI (*relieved*): You're quite right, auntie. . . .

KHAFIZA (*running out of the house*): Yes, we really may be late. Come on, Dekhkanbai.

DEKHKANBAI: Good-bye, Auntie Khamrobibi.

KHAMROBIBI (*stopping Dekhkanbai*): Just a minute, Dekhkanbai. I must keep you a few more seconds. Of course, a second is more precious to a young man than a day to an old woman. Forgive me for delaying you, but. . . .

DEKHKANBAI (*worried*): You have all my attention, auntie.

KHAMROBIBI: Khafiza is still only a girl.



The Uzbek writer Abdulla Kakhar was born in 1907 in the town of Kokand. In 1925, having graduated from the State University in Tashkent, Kakhar began contributing to the press humorous exposures of abuses or inefficiency in social and public life.

From this Kakhar turned to short stories, and his first collection *The World Grows Young* appeared in 1932. During the Second World War Kakhar, by this time a skilled journalist, embarked on a major work about the life of the Uzbek peasantry, the novel *Lights of Koshchinar*, which was published in 1951. His comedy *Silk Suzanai*, which appears in this issue, was also written in post-war years.

Kakhar is also well known as a translator into Uzbek of the Russian classics and Soviet writers.

She may have been made a group-leader, but you know the saying: a girl grows hair, and a man grows a mind.

DEKHKANBAI: That's what they used to say in the old days, auntie.

KHAMROBIBI (*severely*): Listen to what I say, Dekhkanbai!

DEKHKANBAI (*worried*): Every word, auntie.

KHAMROBIBI: I know you are clever and educated, and were at the war and visited foreign countries, and that you will understand me. Now, tell me, Dekhkanbai, is it fitting for a young man and his fiancée to go out of the same gate together before marriage? What will people think?

DEKHKANBAI (*relieved*): So that's it! All right, Auntie Khamrobibi, I'll go out of our own gate. Good-bye, auntie.

KHAFIZA: Good-bye, mother.

Khafiza and Dekhkanbai go out into the street by different gates then pretend to have met each other by chance.

DEKHKANBAI: Why, if it's not Khafiza! Salaam!

KHAFIZA! Salaam! Where have you been all this time?

They run off, laughing.

KHAMROBIBI (*alone*): Custom is custom. (*She goes to shut the gate.*)

Enter Kholniso.

KHOLNISO: Ah, my dear neighbour, have our children gone already? (*She goes to Khamrobibi's gate and looks out into the street*) A fine couple. . . .

KHAMROBIBI: May their path be spread with carpets!

KHOLNISO: May it be so.

The old women shut the gate and go back to the suri.

KHOLNISO: If you have nothing nicer to do, deeply honoured Khamrobibi, let us sit here and have a chat in the cool.

KHAMROBIBI: I could wish for nothing better, dear friend. If you don't mind, I will go on with my cotton. I want to clean as much as I can.

KHOLNISO: It will be a pleasure for me to help you, although your fingers are far more skilled.

KHAMROBIBI: Oh no, dear Kholniso! I shall never be able to work as fast as you. (*She notices the suzanei Khafiza has left behind and shows it to her neighbour*) Khafiza is busy embroidering.

KHOLNISO (*admiring the suzanei*): Your Khafiza has a wonderful pair of hands. Really I don't think any mother could wish for a better wife for her son. (*She folds the suzanei carefully and kisses it.*)

KHAMROBIBI: And your Dekhkanbai? You wouldn't find a better husband in the whole of Uzbekistan! May their life be full of joy!

KHOLNISO: May it be so! We'll have the wedding. . . .

Suddenly Khamrobibi gives a little sob.

KHOLNISO (*trying to calm her*): Please don't take on, dear neighbour. . . .

KHAMROBIBI (*weeping*): She'll fly away soon, my little swallow, she'll be leaving her mother's house.

KHOLNISO: But she won't fly far, neighbour, will she? She'll just flutter over the fence and we'll go on living as we have always lived. We should be glad our children have fallen in love with each other.

KHAMROBIBI: I am glad.

KHOLNISO: It would be nice if your brother, the honoured Mavlon, came to the wedding to rejoice with us. . . .

KHAMROBIBI (*testily*): He's an honoured camel, that's what he is, my brother Mavlon! Going off to the Hungry Steppe! Was he badly off in our kolkhoz? Highly esteemed as a shock-worker for years! But that was not enough for him, he got that idea of the Hungry Steppe into his head! I don't interfere in his affairs, of course. It's not the thing for a woman to interfere with a man's affairs. When he decided to move, I didn't say anything.

KHOLNISO (*incredulously*): Surely you must have said something. . . .

KHAMROBIBI: Not a word! Not a single word! I merely remarked that even as a child he had been more obstinate than the stupidest donkey, and that now a hundred donkeys could not beat him for obstinacy. Going out there into the Hungry Steppe, among the accursed salt marshes, on land that even Allah has turned away from.

KHOLNISO: Yes, that's the Hungry Steppe! No one has ever prospered much out there.

Enter Aman. He walks despondently towards his house.

KHOLNISO: Aman!

He stops.

AMAN (*noticing the old women for the first time*): What? Oh, salaam! Good evening, Auntie Khamrobibi!

KHAMROBIBI: Is the meeting over already?

AMAN: The meeting? Yes, but the committee has stayed on. (*He goes into the house.*)

KHAMROBIBI: What is the matter with your younger son?

KHOLNISO: I can't understand it myself. (*She runs into the house and reappears with Aman.*) Aren't you well, Aman? I can see something has happened. . . . Did they tell you off for something at the meeting?

AMAN: What makes you think that, mother? Have I done something that would make people think I am not doing my duty as a Comsomol member? I would die of shame. (*Turns to go.*)

KHOLNISO (*sternly*): Aman!

AMAN: Everything's all right, mother! Khafiza and Dekhkanbai will be back soon. I'm quite well. (*Goes out.*)

KHAMROBIBI: It's rather strange. . . . But the young are like that sometimes. (*She rises*) Well, I'll go and put the kettle on. I'll come back in a moment, dear. (*She goes out.*)

KHOLNISO (*alone*): Oh, children, children. . . .

Aman looks round the door and runs up to Kholniso.

AMAN: You see, mother. I didn't want to speak in front of Auntie Khamrobibi. . . . The point is that at the meeting they talked about Dekhkanbai.

KHOLNISO: Was my elder son criticized? Oh, what a misfortune!

AMAN: You always think people are being criticized. Talking about someone doesn't mean criticizing him. As a matter of fact they were praising Dekhkanbai. And Khafiza too. The point is they. . .

Khamrobibi appears at the window.

. . . the point is that Dekhkanbai and Khafiza—they're going away!

KHAMROBIBI (*at the window*): Where? (*She pulls the curtain.*)

Aman jumps up and looks round but sees no one.

KHOLNISO: Where are they going? To the district centre? To Tashkent? Tell me. To a study course? To a conference?

AMAN: You'll never guess, mother. . . .

Khamrobibi again appears at the window.

They're going away to the Hungry Steppe.

KHAMROBIBI (*at the window*): Oh! (*Pulls the curtain.*)

Aman jumps up and looks round but sees no one.

KHOLNISO: What tale is this? What do you mean?

AMAN: It's not a tale, it's correct information. Dekhkanbai, Khafiza and five other Comsomol members have pledged themselves to go to the Hungry Steppe. . . . (*With vexation*) And they won't take me!

KHOLNISO: No, no! Allah will not allow it! You have made a mistake, you silly boy.

AMAN: Allow me to tell you, mother, that it is you who are making the mistake. What can your Allah do about it if Dekhkanbai's pledge has been approved by a Comsomol meeting?

KHOLNISO: I know who thought of this. . . . Khafiza! She was the one. No one else could do such a thing! Her uncle, that obstinate Mavlon, lives in the Hungry Steppe! Let her go to him. But I won't let her take Dekhkanbai!

KHAMROBIBI (*appearing at the window*): I know who started it all. . . . It was your Dekhkanbai. . . . My only daughter. . . . Little did I think. . . . Take your presents back!

KHOLNISO (*resolutely*): Go and take back our presents, Aman!

AMAN: But wait until Dekhkanbai. . . .

Khamrobibi appears dragging a chest out of the house.

KHAMROBIBI: There! Take your presents. . . . If your Dekhkanbai is so anxious to live in the Hungry Steppe, let him live there. (*Drags the chest into Kholniso's yard.*) But he needn't lead my daughter astray! There are plenty of better husbands than him!

KHOLNISO: Kindly hold your tongue, honoured Khamrobibi!

AMAN (*holding Kholniso back*): Mother! Mother!

KHOLNISO: It's your Khafiza who has led my son astray! He'll find someone better-looking than her! If you shake a tree the girls just fall down from it!

AMAN: Mother, what are you saying!?

KHOLNISO: Go away, Aman, don't interrupt our quiet little chat. (*Pushes Aman into the house.*)

KHAMROBIBI: Listen to this croaking frog! It's your son, your son who's taking away my Khafiza!

KHOLNISO: Dekhkanbai is taking away her Khafiza! How many years did my dear son spend at the war, how many years did he long to be home! Do you think he will leave his mother's house now? What is he, a scorpion, that he should live in the Hungry Steppe? But your Khafiza has an uncle there, your brother—an honoured camel, I believe you called him, neighbour dear? Well, if she likes him better than her own mother, let Khafiza go away to him, but she won't take Dekhkanbai with her!

KHAMROBIBI: You simply don't know what you're talking about. Who ever heard of a girl leading a man astray?

KHOLNISO: And who ever heard of girls sitting on tractors and challenging bearded men to compete with them? Your Khafiza for one!

KHAMROBIBI (*shouting*): Don't dare to mention her name!

AMAN (*running out on to the verandah*): Auntie! Mother! Don't shout like that.

KHAMROBIBI: I haven't started shouting yet. Khafiza won't go with your Dekhkanbai, she's not a bell round a sheep's neck.

Aman has an idea and runs into the house.

KHOLNISO: What! Dekhkanbai a sheep?

KHAMROBIBI: Yes, yes, a sheep! Meh—meh!

KHOLNISO (*rolling up her sleeves*): Well, neighbour, I'll show you. . . .

KHAMROBIBI: Well, friend. We'll see who. . . .

Aman runs in with two bowls in his hands.

AMAN (*handing the old women the bowls*): Mother! Auntie! Have something to drink, or you'll get hoarse.

The old women mechanically drink water.

(*To himself*) It's like a water cooling system. . . . When a radiator starts boiling, they pour in water too.

Khafiza and Dekhkanbai are seen coming along the street.

KHOLNISO: Come along, Aman! (*To Khamrobibi*) Just let that Khafiza show her face here! (*Goes into the house.*)

KHAMROBIBI (*as she enters her house*): Just let your Dekhkanbai show his face here!

KHAFIZA: They've found out already!

DEKHKANBAI: Is Aman here? Of course, he's blurted everything out. You go home, Khafiza. I've been under fire before, I'll face the first volley by myself.

Khamrobibi comes out with a gramophone and carries it into her neighbour's yard. While her back is turned, Khafiza slips into the house.

KHAMROBIBI: Take your gramophone too! Take all your presents. Just wait till your Dekhkanbai comes back!

KHOLNISO (*comes out on to the verandah*): Dragging my son away from home! Just wait till your Khafiza comes back!

DEKHKANBAI (*entering the yard*): Salaam, Auntie Khamrobibi! Good evening, mother! I seem to have interrupted your quiet little chat?

AMAN (*to Dekhkanbai*): They've been shouting their heads off!

DEKHKANBAI: Is this your work?

AMAN: I Just gave them the information . . . I . . . er . . . I think I'd better go. (*Runs out to the street.*)

DEKHKANBAI: If I am not mistaken, you were talking about the Hungry Steppe.

KHOLNISO: Letting yourself be dragged away like a bundle of rags! Who will call you a man after this?!

KHAMROBIBI: Turning a young girl's head! Leading her astray! And this was the man I wanted as my son-in-law!

DEKHKANBAI: Excuse me for interrupting you, but . . . without your consent we shan't go anywhere.

KHAMROBIBI (*astounded*): What?!

DEKHKANBAI: Without your consent we shan't go anywhere.

KHAMROBIBI: You won't go?

DEKHKANBAI: No!

KHAMROBIBI (*resolutely*): You won't have my consent!

DEKHKANBAI: Then we shan't go anywhere!

KHOLNISO: Now are you satisfied, neighbour dear? No son of mine would go against his mother! Tell me, son, who first thought of this idea?

KHAMROBIBI: Tell us, Dekhkanbai, did you think of it first?

KHOLNISO (*to Khamrobibi*): Wait a minute, neighbour.

KHAMROBIBI: No, you wait a minute!

DEKHKANBAI (*forestalling another eruption*): The idea first occurred to the... Comsomol congress. At the congress there was talk of the Comsomol members attacking the Hungry Steppe.

KHAMROBIBI: The Hungry Steppe! Allah himself has turned his back on that land.

DEKHKANBAI: That's what we are Communists for, to correct the errors of Allah.

KHOLNISO: Don't make Allah angry, my son!

DEKHKANBAI: Your Allah will only thank us for it, mother! Thousands of hectares of fertile land are going to waste. Why? There's plenty of water there. The state gives us tractors, machinery, building material. All that's needed are people to plough up this virgin soil, people like me, like Khafiza. . . .

KHAMROBIBI: Like Khafiza?! They're going! They're going!

KHOLNISO: What are you talking about, my son?

DEKHKANBAI: But I said we wouldn't go anywhere without your consent.

KHAMROBIBI: Not without my consent?

DEKHKANBAI: No!

KHAMROBIBI (*resolutely*): You won't have my consent!

DEKHKANBAI: Then we won't go anywhere! I'm only repeating what was said at the congress. We talked about our fathers and our grandfathers. . . . How they dreamed of having land and water! And now there's as much land and water as we could wish for, and we, young Communists, can make their dream come true. Our Uzbekistan . . . (*He sees the suzanei lying on the suri*) It's like this silk, like a silk suzanei.

KHAMROBIBI (*proudly*): That's Khafiza's work.

DEKHKANBAI: And what would you say if this suzanei had a patch of sacking on it?

KHOLNISO: You must be mad!

KHAMROBIBI: Fancy saying a thing like that about his fiancée's present!

DEKHKANBAI: I didn't mean to offend you, Auntie Khamrobibi. I was only thinking. . . . Our Uzbekistan, it's like silk, it's all full of gleaming colours. But the Hungry Steppe is like a patch of sacking on a silk suzanei. I said so at the meeting today, and I looked at Khafiza . . . and she looked at me . . . and we smiled at each other. . . .

KHAMROBIBI: You must have smiled first?

DEKHKANBAI: If I hadn't been first, she would have been.

KHOLNISO (*moved*): You love each other.

KHAMROBIBI: And you will stay here with us.

DEKHKANBAI: Of course, we shall, although today . . . at the meeting . . . we gave a pledge. . . .

KHAMROBIBI: What? What pledge? To go away?!

KHOLNISO: Did you give your word, my son?

DEKHKANBAI: Oh, never mind. . . . I've told you we won't go anywhere without your consent.

KHAMROBIBI: Nowhere?

DEKHKANBAI: No!

KHAMROBIBI (*resolutely*): You won't have my consent.

DEKHKANBAI (*slightly irritated*): Then we shan't go anywhere! (*He moves away*).

KHAMROBIBI: Praise be to Allah, everything's all right! They still listen to their mothers in spite of these meetings. But where has my daughter got to?

DEKHKANBAI: She came home a long time ago. We came together.

KHAMROBIBI: Good heavens, and I'm still sitting here. I must give her something to eat. (*Turns to go*.)

KHOLNISO: Just a minute, neighbour! (*She nods towards the chest and the gramophone*.)

DEKHKANBAI (*noticing the chest*): What's this?

KHAMROBIBI (*confused*): We were just looking at them together.

Khamrobibi and Kholniso drag the presents back into the house.

KHOLNISO (*reappearing*): You must have your supper too. (*She goes into her house*.)

DEKHKANBAI: Just coming, mother. (*Alone*) Mothers! Our dear mothers! How well you understand our childish chatter, and how hard it is for you to understand us when we grow up. Mother will understand me, but Auntie Khamrobibi. . . .

Enter Khafiza.

KHAFIZA: Dekhkanbai, how did you manage to persuade mother? I thought she would be weeping night and day from now on. But she's glad and she's praising you. Did you tell them everything?

DEKHKANBAI: Nearly everything. I said we wouldn't go anywhere.

KHAFIZA: What?

DEKHKANBAI: I said we wouldn't go without their blessing. Have patience, Khafiza, and you'll see. Our mothers will be packing us off themselves soon.

KHAMROBIBI'S VOICE: Khafiza! Supper's ready!

DEKHKANBAI: I'll be waiting for you in the garden, Khafiza.

Khafiza goes out.

Patience . . . patience. . . .

Enter Kholniso.

Be patient and in your aim believe,
For patience can all pain relieve,
The thorns that once did prick us sore,
Are now with roses decked o'er,
And salty marsh and desert sand
Has patience made a flowering land.

KHOLNISO: Who was that you were talking to, my son?

DEKHKANBAI: To myself, mother. I like talking to somebody intelligent.

(*Seriously*) Some lines of poetry came into my head. It's a hundred years since they were written. No, more than a hundred. But people still remember them. The name of the poet who wrote those lines was Gulkhani.

KHOLNISO: He must have been a great man.

DEKHKANBAI: He was. A very great man. And he spent his whole life in poverty. They say he never once sat down to a good feast and never once broke bread from a whole loaf.

KHOLNISO: We all lived like that once. We had to put up with it. Yes, what a lot we had to put up with! But now. . . . We have Lenin to thank for the life we live today.

DEKHKANBAI: And it turns out that I am ungrateful.

KHOLNISO: What do you mean, my son? Who dares to say such a thing about my son?

Enter Aman.

AMAN: Dekhkanbai! They've already put up the wall-newspaper in the club. There's a newsflash that says: "Greetings to the Comsomol members who are going out to transform the Hungry Steppe."

DEKHKANBAI: There's the answer to your question, mother.

AMAN: One day they'll write about me like that too.

KHOLNISO: Aman, go and have your supper!

DEKHKANBAI (*with a sigh*): Go and have your supper, Aman.

AMAN (*with a sigh*): All right, mother. (*Goes into the house*).

KHOLNISO: Why did you promise to go to the Hungry Steppe? Weren't you enough to the fore without that? Your name is on the Board of Honour. You are the pride of our kolkhoz. You were at the war and you came back with decorations. And if Allah wills it, you will have an award for cotton-growing shining on your chest.

DEKHKANBAI: Medals shine when there is a road ahead for them to shine on, and they stop shining when a man turns his back on that road.

KHOLNISO: But why must your road lead into the Hungry Steppe? The Hungry Steppe of all places!

DEKHKANBAI: It used to be hungry. But we will turn it into a blossoming garden.

KHOLNISO: Let others do it. Why should you?

DEKHKANBAI (*with deep feeling*): You gave me your blessing when I went off to the war. . . .

KHOLNISO: You went to defend your country. It is a thousand times better to endure the loss of a son than to know that he has failed in his duty.

DEKHKANBAI: But what about now? When the country is calling us to conquer nature, to turn barren salt marshes into fertile fields—am I to fail in my duty? Will you refuse me your blessing? I can't believe it!

KHOLNISO (*with a sob*): So we shall be parted again. What a grief for me!

DEKHKANBAI: Will it be for long? Khafiza and I will build a little house and you and Auntie Khamrobibi will come to live with us.
KHOLNISO (*still sobbing*): You won't talk Khamrobibi round. She won't let Khafiza go.

DEKHKANBAI: I won't, but you will.

KHOLNISO: What?

DEKHKANBAI: She'll listen to you.

KHOLNISO (*with conviction*): Oh no, she won't! She's even more obstinate than her brother!

DEKHKANBAI: She's listened to you for forty years, do you mean to say she won't listen to you now? Tell her everything. Explain things to her.

KHOLNISO: You mean you want me to be a kind of—propagandist!

DEKHKANBAI: That's right, mother. You be our propagandist! Go along to auntie. . . .

KHOLNISO: Now?

DEKHKANBAI: Why put it off?

KHOLNISO (*hesitating*): Well, I'll try. But now go and have your supper. Everything's ready on the table.

Exit Dekhkanbai.

A propagandist in my old age! (*She approaches Khamrobibi's house.*) Neighbour dear! . . .

KHAMROBIBI (*coming out on to the verandah*): Salaam, dear friend!

KHOLNISO: Have you had supper? If it will please you, I will come inside and we'll have a chat.

KHAMROBIBI: Honour my house with your presence, my dear Kholniso.

The old women go into the house.

DEKHKANBAI (*coming out on to the verandah*): What a wonderful mother I have!

Enter Aman.

AMAN: Dekhkanbai, I forgot to tell you. I've got an assignment from the Comsomol.

DEKHKANBAI: What is it?

AMAN: To organize an aero-modellers' group. There are lots of chaps who've put their names down already! And do you know what I've started building?

DEKHKANBAI: A tractor?

AMAN (*offended*): Tractors can't fly! I'm building a helicopter. With a miniature petrol motor. Do you know how high it'll be able to fly?

DEKHKANBAI: About five metres?

The old women's voices are heard within. Dekhkanbai hurriedly leads Aman away.

AMAN (*going off*): Five metres?! Twenty-five! I've made one wing already. Would you like me to show it to you?

Khamrobibi and Kholniso appear on the verandah.

KHAMROBIBI: No, no, no, and no again!

KHOLNISO: But you haven't heard all I have to say, dear neighbour.

KHAMROBIBI: Of course, I never interfere in other people's affairs. Dekhkanbai is your son so I won't say anything about it. I will merely remark that if a son disobeys his mother, he is cursed and not blessed.

KHOLNISO: Listen to me, neighbour, we've been friends for forty years. In forty years have I ever done you a bad turn?

KHAMROBIBI: There's your verandah, and there's your gate. Good night, honoured Kholniso!

KHOLNISO (*entering her own yard*): I can't even be angry with you, dear friend. Who could be angry with such a backward woman?

KHAMROBIBI (*surprised*): What's that? What did you say?

KHOLNISO: I said one shouldn't be angry with a backward woman.

KHAMROBIBI: Backward? (*With a sob*) And we've been friends for forty years, forty years. And now I'm backward and you're advanced?!

KHOLNISO: I may be advanced and I may be not, no one writes about me in the newspapers. But I understand more than you.

KHAMROBIBI: You mean to say I understand less than you?

KHOLNISO: Not less perhaps, but you always start understanding later.

KHAMROBIBI: What did I understand later than you? Come on, tell me.

KHOLNISO: Remember the land reform? When Soviet power took the land and cattle from the *bais* and shared it out among the poor peasants and labourers. What did you say then?

KHAMROBIBI: Well, what did I say?

KHOLNISO: "It's against Allah, Allah will be angry. . . ."

KHAMROBIBI: Perhaps I did say that. But they were not my words. "The mother of water is the spring, and the mother of the word is the ear." What my ears heard, my mouth repeated. And besides we didn't refuse the land, we took it!

KHOLNISO: Indeed you did, but you took it after we did. But as soon as I heard the land would be shared out among the poor peasants, I prayed night and day for Lenin. So you did start understanding later than me. Yes, later! And when did you give up your veil? Remember?

KHAMROBIBI: There's no denying that. . . . A year after you did.

KHOLNISO: A year and a half after.

KHAMROBIBI: But I gave it up, didn't I?

KHOLNISO: And when did you join the kolkhoz?

KHAMROBIBI: After you. But I joined it! (*Lifting her arms*) May our kolkhoz flourish—to the glory of Allah!

KHOLNISO: Well, there you are. You come to understand what I understand. But later! I have understood how pleased Allah . . . (*Checking herself*) how right our children's idea is. And you will come to understand it too. But later. . . always later.

Dekhkanbai enters unnoticed.

KHAMROBIBI (*confused*): My only daughter . . . the joy of my heart. . . . How could she leave me?

KHOLNISO: Ah, neighbour, who's going to leave you? They'll go out there, take a look around, build themselves a home. The state will help them. They'll build a house, make themselves an orchard and a vegetable garden. And then they'll ask us to come and live with them. The Hungry Steppe—pooh! The honoured Mavlon lives there, doesn't he? It was in the old days it used to be called the Hungry Steppe, but our children will turn it into a beautiful garden. Come, dear friend, let us bring Khafiza the glad news. I'll help you up. Come, dear neighbour. (*They enter Khamrobibi's house*).

DEKHKANBAI (*he has heard everything*): What a clever woman my mother is! To be able to persuade Khamrobibi. . . . (*He notices Khafiza coming out of her house and hides behind a tree.*)

KHAFIZA: He doesn't know that everything is all right. My darling. (*Looks up at the sky*) What a big moon! So big and round. Ever since I was a little girl it has stopped over our house and smiled at me. Good-bye, moon! I'm going away!

DEKHKANBAI (*coming up to Khafiza*): My moon! No, not the moon! My sun! My most beautiful sun. . . . We're going. Khafiza! We're going!

KHAFIZA: Do you know already? Mother and Auntie Kholniso are discussing how many loaves we'll need to take with us for the journey. We're going! We're going!

DEKHKANBAI: To the Hungry Steppe. . . . It will be silvery with cotton, and green with orchards and vineyards.

Enter Aman with a thick book in his hands.

You and I, Khafiza, will move mountains in the steppe!

AMAN: Excuse me for interrupting you! But as far as I can make out from our textbooks, there are no mountains in the steppe.

DEKHKANBAI: Then we'll remake your textbooks too!

AMAN (*handing them his book*): It would be a good idea to make it shorter.

Enter Kholniso and Khamrobibi. They walk towards Kholniso's house, carrying jars and packages.

KHAMROBIBI: I won't say anything. I merely wish to remark that if Khafiza stays with Mavlon it won't do for Dekhkanbai to live there too.

KHAFIZA: But mother! . . .

KHAMROBIBI: I didn't say anything. I merely remarked. . . .

KHOLNISO: They will live in different houses. And when they get married, they will build themselves a house of their own. (*She makes a gesture to show the size of the house.*) Like this, or like this. . . . We must give them more flour.

KHAMROBIBI: And sugar.

DEKHKANBAI: And butter.

KHAMROBIBI (*to Dekhkanbai*): Tsh, young man, fancy a young man taking an interest in old women's affairs.

They go into Kholniso's house.

DEKHKANBAI (*to Khafiza*): A house like this? Or one like this?

KHAFIZA (*dreamily*): No. . . . In the Hungry Steppe we'll build big houses with lots of light and air.

AMAN: Tall buildings! Like the ones in Moscow! Shall we, Dekhkanbai?

DEKHKANBAI: Perhaps they won't be so tall as in Moscow, but we shall certainly be able to see Moscow from them. You can see Moscow from any place where a new life is being built.

A jar falls with a crash in Kholniso's house, then Khamrobibi appears and runs to her own house. Kholniso comes running after her. Dekhkanbai, Khafiza and Aman go rushing after the old women.

DEKHKANBAI: Another quarrel?

KHOLNISO (*still running*): No, not this time.

Khamrobibi comes out of her house with an alarm clock.

KHAMROBIBI: Oh, what a day . . . what a day. . . . And I nearly forgot to wind up the alarm! (*She winds it up.*)

Curtain

ACT TWO

SCENE 1

The Hungry Steppe. Rush-thatched huts stretch away to the right. On the left, a canal can be seen in the distance. It comes from somewhere beyond the horizon. The left bank of the canal is silvery with cotton, on the right there is still much uncultivated land. In the foreground stands a rather ramshackle hut with a rush roof. An electric bulb hangs over the door. Before it stand a roughly made table and chairs. Nearby there is a stove in the open air. It is a bright sunny day. In front of the hut, on a home-made couch under a home-made tent lies Maylon with several blankets over him. His head is wrapped in a towel. Saltanat's voice is heard: "Adilov! Adilov!" Maylon grunts and turns over. Saltanat runs in. Saltanat has always a lot of jobs to do and she ticks them off on her fingers. Under her arm she carries a brief-case.

SALTANAT (*looking for someone*): Adilov! Adilov!

MAVLON (*raising himself on his elbow*): Listen, Saltanat, have you ever heard a muezzin calling from his minaret?

SALTANAT: No, Maylon-aka, never.

MAVLON: Well, you shout louder! (*Lies down and covers his head with the blanket.*)

SALTANAT: I'm sorry. . . . I forgot you weren't well. I'm looking for the Party organizer. . . . (*Bends down one finger*) The chairman has not come back from the MTS—one. . . . The Party organizer isn't here—two. . . . And the Comsomol members have already arrived. . . .

MAVLON (*raising himself*): What?

SALTANAT: I said the Comsomol members have arrived. They are moving into our kolkhoz.

MAVLON: Why didn't you say so before?

SALTANAT: But I did.

Mavlon gets up.

What are you doing? You mustn't get up.

MAVLON: Don't try to teach your team-leader. A team-leader knows what he's got to do. (*Goes into the hut and reappears without the towel on his head and carrying a pair of boots.*) Do you know where they are from? What district?

SALTANAT: From the Andizhan region. But you mustn't get up today. . . . You've got malaria!

MAVLON (*pulling on his boots.*): From Andizhan. That's where I come from!

SALTANAT: I won't let you go, Mavlon! The Party organizer said you must stay in bed. . . . (*Grabs his boot.*)

MAVLON: Saltanat! Give me my boot, don't make me angry! A team-leader can't stay in bed when a bunch of Comsomols come to the kolkhoz. Who but a team-leader must meet them? Are there many?

SALTANAT: Yes, a lot. . . .

MAVLON: Are there any girls with them?

SALTANAT: Three.

MAVLON: My niece may be with them. (*Goes off.*)

SALTANAT (*overtaking Mavlon*): Is your niece supposed to be coming? You were told to stay in bed. The Party organizer will be angry.

Mavlon and Saltanat go off. The noise of a car, a scream of brakes, voices. Enter Rakhimdjan, a very fat man in a white tunic with a thermos flask hanging at his side. He is carrying a smart brief-case.

RAKHIMDJAN (*to his driver in the wings*): Karim! Just a minute, I'll find something to put under the wheel. . . . Try this board, Karim! (*Hands it into the wings*) Here you are! (*Engine roars*) Oh, still skidding . . . Karim! Put her into reverse. . . . Now, forward! Still skidding!

Adilov limps in, leaning on a stick. He is lame. On his military tunic there are medal ribbons and wound stripes. At the sight of Rakhimdjan he halts and watches the fussing chairman with a smile.

Karim! Switch off the engine, you'll use up all your petrol! Ah, there's a tractor! Go over to the driver and tell him the chairman's car is stuck in a ditch and has got to be pulled out. (*Noticing Adilov*) Ah, salaam, Adilov-aka! Salaam, Party organizer! (*Embarrassed*) A slight upset with the car. . . .

ADILOV: So I see. Front wheels on the road and back wheels in the ditch

RAKHIMDJAN: A slight skid at the turn.

ADILOV: Possibly you were going slightly faster than you should, my dear Rakhimdjani?

RAKHIMDJAN: A chairman hasn't time to drive slowly! Even with a car I'm run off my feet! Let's have a rest. Would you like some tea? (*Unscrews the thermos*) Thirsty weather, eh? It's very good tea, nice and hot.

ADILOV: Have you been to the MTS?

RAKHIMDJAN: Yes, I have. And to the cotton station. I've been everywhere. (*Despairingly*) I've inspected the drying sheds . . . we haven't enough of them. We've got the timber but no one to build the sheds.

ADILOV: We must find the people.

RAKHIMDJAN: There aren't enough! We can't get the cotton harvested in time. If only those Comsomols would arrive.

ADILOV: I rang the district committee this morning.

RAKHIMDJAN: Well?

ADILOV: They say we can expect them any day now.

RAKHIMDJAN: Let's hope so. . . . My head's in a whirl. Where have you been? In the office?

ADILOV: No, in the fields. I was going back to the farm and decided to call in on Mavlon on the way.

RAKHIMDJAN (*surprised*): Mavlon? The team-leader? You're hoping to find him at home, during the day?

ADILOV: Mavlon's ill. I hardly managed to get him to come in from the fields and lie down.

RAKHIMDJAN (*in despair*): Oh dear, our best team-leader ill!

ADILOV: I made him promise not to go out in the fields for the time being. Shall we go and see our team-leader?

RAKHIMDJAN: Yes, just for five minutes, while they're pulling the car out. . . . (*To his driver*) Karim, how are you getting on?

KARIM'S VOICE: Changing one of the plugs, chairman!

RAKHIMDJAN (*to the driver*): You ought to be driving a donkey, not a car.

Meanwhile Adilov has knocked at the door. No answer.

Well, can't you make anyone hear?

ADILOV: He must be asleep. It's not worth waking him.

RAKHIMDJAN: Yes, why should we? We'll just go in quietly. You never know what may happen; he lives all alone. (*He opens the door and puts his foot across the threshold, but stops*) You'd better go in. I'm very fat, the boards will creak.

Adilov enters the hut. Rakhimdjani listens intently.

ADILOV'S VOICE: What the devil! What an obstinate fellow!

RAKHIMDJAN (*in surprise*): Shouting at a team-leader? When the poor fellow is ill?

Adilov reappears.

(*Indignantly*) Why did you shout at Mavlon?

ADILOV: Where is Mavlon? Go and see for yourself, he's not at home!

RAKHIMDJAN (*delighted*): There's a man for you! Must be out in the fields! Even when he's ill! That's character, eh? Firm! Persistent!

ADILOV: Persistence is good, but obstinacy is not so good.

RAKHIMDJAN: Ah, men are what they are. We all have our good points and our bad ones. One man's a little obstinate, another (*stroking his belly*) a little stout. . . .

ADILOV: One man doesn't like criticism, another doesn't like it when people criticize his team-leader.

RAKHIMDJAN (*taking the hint*): And yet another doesn't like the team-leader.

ADILOV: But I do like Mavlon! I respect and value him greatly, but, my dear Rakhimdjan, I am afraid Mavlon's character will one day cost him and the kolkhoz very dear.

SALTANAT'S VOICE: Rakhimdjan!

ADILOV: Saltanat is looking for you. (*He rises*) Well, all the best! I'm off to the farm, and from there I'll go to the office. (*Goes off.*)

SALTANAT'S VOICE: Rakhimdjan! Rakhimdjan!

RAKHIMDJAN: I'm here, Saltanat! Here!

Saltanat runs in.

SALTANAT (*breathing hard*): I've been looking for you all over the village.

RAKHIMDJAN (*philosophically*): That's what a secretary is for—to look for the chairman. Have a breather, Saltanat.

SALTANAT: I'll have one afterwards. The young people have arrived—one!

RAKHIMDJAN: What, already? Why didn't you tell me?

SALTANAT: I am telling you.

RAKHIMDJAN: We were going to give them a welcome and find some nice quarters for them. We were going to show them round and give them something to eat.

SALTANAT (*counting on her fingers*): Supper's being made for them—two. I've shown them the hostel—three. . . .

RAKHIMDJAN (*delighted*): There's a secretary for you! A real secretary! When you get a bit fatter, you'll make a chairman! (*To the driver*) Karim, how's the car?

KARIM'S VOICE: Ready, chairman!

RAKHIMDJAN (*going to the car*): Well, Saltanat, don't lag behind your chairman.

SALTANAT (*following him*): Mavlon's niece has arrived—with her husband-to-be.

RAKHIMDJAN (*stops*): What a pity! And Mavlon's gone off to the fields.

SALTANAT: He's in the office! He's already had a talk with the young people! Our Mavlon's always first on the spot.

Rakhimdjani and Saltanat go away. Hoots from the departing car. A pause. Then enter Mavlon, Khafiza and Dekhkanbai, the latter loaded with suitcases.

MAVLON (*pointing to his house*): There you are, Khafiza, there's the abode of your uncle Mavlon. My house is your house! (*Unexpectedly*) But Khafiza, what a beauty you've become! You take after your mother, the honoured Khamrobibi. And your fiancé is not so bad either.

Khafiza flushes and runs away into the house.

(*Taking one of the suitcases*) Come in, too, Dekhkanbai.

DEKHKANBAI: Coming, uncle. . . .

Mavlon enters the hut. Dekhkanbai puts down his suitcase and gazes round at the melancholy scene. Mavlon comes out again.

MAVLON: Well, I know what you're thinking! The Hungry Steppe—this is a fine hole I've come to! (*He lights the stove.*)

DEKHKANBAI: No, uncle, you're wrong. Let me help you. (*He blows at the fire.*)

MAVLON: Yes . . . there are people the Hungry Steppe still frightens. But you young people never saw the Hungry Steppe as it used to be. When I first came here there was nothing, absolutely nothing! And very few people too. Not enough machines, not enough water—in those days we hadn't yet built the Far-khad Power Station. I dug ditches, canals, ponds. . . . Did you see the poplars along the road?

DEKHKANBAI: Of course.

MAVLON: I planted them! And the mulberry? Did you notice the mulberry?

DEKHKANBAI: It's a fine mulberry!

MAVLON: I planted it. Do you see this hut? I built it. A bad one, you say? Well, it's not so good, I agree. But never mind: "Even a crust of bread is bread, and crumbs are also bread!" When we lived in tents, it seemed like a palace. Ah, dear Dekhkanbai, it's not the houses that make a kolkhoz flourish, but the cotton. It was cotton that made Mavlon famous, not his house! (*To Khafiza as she appears from the hut*) What is it, Khafiza?

KHAFIZA: Uncle, have you got a pot? I want to cook a *shurpa*.¹

MAVLON: A pot? There used to be one somewhere. In the shed, I think. . . . Behind the house. (*Khafiza runs off*) Yes, cotton loves me. You'll see what a harvest I've got on my sector. Mavlon's cotton!

Voices are heard singing in chorus.

(*Listening*) They're coming in from work. When shall we go out to the fields, Dekhkanbai?

¹ *shurpa*—mutton and rice soup.

DEKHKANBAI: Any time you like!

MAVLON: It's too light now. We'll go at night. In the dark. So the Party organizer won't see us. He doesn't let me go out to the fields. . . .

DEKHKANBAI (*surprised*): Doesn't let a team-leader go to the fields?

MAVLON: I'm ill. I promised him I wouldn't leave the house until I got better.

KHAFIZA (*appearing at the door*): Where's your salt, uncle?

MAVLON: Salt? Now there was some salt somewhere. . . . (*Goes into the house*).

KUZIYEV'S VOICE: Don't wait for me, Yusup! I'm going to see the team-leader.

Enter Kuziyev.

KUZIYEV: Salaam! Is the team-leader at home?

DEKHKANBAI: Yes. I'll call him.

KUZIYEV: No, never mind, I'll wait. (*A pause*) Excuse me, but I don't think I've seen you before. Did you come here recently?

DEKHKANBAI: As a matter of fact I've only just arrived.

KUZIYEV: Well, that is recent. And how do you like it here?

DEKHKANBAI: How shall I put it—so far I'm just weighing things up.

A pause.

KUZIYEV: Do you smoke?

DEKHKANBAI: Yes.

KUZIYEV (*producing cigarettes*): Well, let's do as the song says: "Let's light our fags, friend, one for you and one for me. . . ."

DEKHKANBAI (*picks up the tune of the wartime song*): "One for you and one for me, friend. . . ."

Kuziyev offers his cigarettes to Dekhkanbai, Dekhkanbai offers his to Kuziyev.

They bow and take each other's cigarettes. Dekhkanbai lights his cigarette with

Kuziyev's matches, Kuziyev with Dekhkanbai's.

KUZIYEV: I don't want to appear curious, but would you tell me your name?

DEKHKANBAI: Dekhkanbai.

KUZIYEV: I'm glad to meet you. My name's Khashim. Khashim Kuziyev.

DEKHKANBAI: I shall remember it as the name of a friend. (*Indicating Kuziyev's medal ribbons*) I see you were at the war too. How far did you get, when we drove the fascists back?

KUZIYEV: Others did that. . . . My job was building bridges. I saw the battle-fields but never took part in a battle. Just my luck!

DEKHKANBAI: Your medals prove that building bridges is also a fighting job.

KUZIYEV: Ah, the bridges our sappers built! Perhaps you crossed some of them? We got as far as Budapest.

DEKHKANBAI: No, I was in East Prussia. . . .



Evening at Lake Issyk-kul

Ural Tensykbayev (Uzbek S.S.R.)



Kashgar Poetess

Shamsroi Khasanova (Uzbek S.S.R.)

KUZIYEV: Ah, a different direction. Otherwise we might have met each other. Where have you just come from?

DEKHKANBAI: Andizhan region.

KUZIYEV: Wrong direction again. I'm a townsman, from Samarkand, but I've spent most of my time on construction jobs.

DEKHKANBAI: So you're a builder? That's interesting.

KUZIYEV: Ah, Dekhkanbai! I love building. One day there's nothing, next day you're mixing up the clay, the sawdust's flying, and by evening you've built a house. And the day after there'll be blue shutters, pink curtains, and you can start planting your tulips and asters and daisies. One evening it's a house you've just built, and next morning it's like in the song: "That little house I know. . . ."

DEKHKANBAI (*picking up the song*): ". . . a garden green. . . ."

KUZIYEV (*emphatically*): ". . . a glance that's tender."

(*He breaks off with a sigh*) Yes, I've built houses everywhere. But here. . .

DEKHKANBAI: Do the salt marshes make it difficult?

KUZIYEV: It's not the salt marshes.

DEKHKANBAI: What's the trouble then?

KUZIYEV: Don't let's talk about unpleasant things when we've only just met.

DEKHKANBAI: Patience, Khashim. You'll have your blue shutters and pink curtains and—what kind of glance, was it?

KUZIYEV: A tender one. (*He hears Saltanat's voice*) Saltanat!

Saltanat runs in.

KUZIYEV (*to Saltanat*): Darling of my eyes!

SALTANAT: Khashim . . . (*Tenderly*) I've been looking for you all over the village. But now I'm in such a hurry, Khashim. Do you know how many jobs I've got to do? (*Counting on her fingers*) Ring up the district executive committee—one, call at the stores—two, see the agronomist—three. . . . And what's this? (*Remembering*) Oh yes, at eight sharp this evening there's a Comsomol meeting, everyone must be there! (*To Dekhkanbai*) Tell Khafiza.

KUZIYEV (*quietly*): Saltanat, shall we be sitting together at the meeting?

SALTANAT (*embarrassed*): Good-bye, Khashim. (*Runs off.*)

DEKHKANBAI: Well, you've made a start, the tender glance is there already.

KUZIYEV: Yes, there's a tender glance all right, but. . . . (*Waves his hand in annoyance.*)

DEKHKANBAI: What's worrying you?

KUZIYEV: I'm a builder. But there's no building going on in the kolkhoz; they've put me in the cotton fields. I don't know anything about cotton. I'm a builder! And not a bad builder either. Now they've brought some boards. Very good boards! But the way they've stacked them. They'll all go rotten!

DEKHKANBAI: That's bad!

KUZIYEV: I want to stack them properly. I'd manage it in a day!

DEKHKANBAI: Just tell the team-leader. . . .

KUZIYEV: But I've told him thirty-five times and he won't let me. I'm asking him for the last time today.

DEKHKANBAI (*surprised*): You mean Mavlon-aka?

KUZIYEV: Yes, Mavlon-aka. Do you know him?

DEKHKANBAI: He's my fiancée's uncle.

KUZIYEV: (*ironically*): Congratulations!

DEKHKANBAI: I don't understand. Mavlon-aka is a very worthy man.

KUZIYEV: I mean I'm congratulating you on having a fiancée.

DEKHKANBAI: Thank you. Khafiza has been my fiancée for a long time. We came here together. I hope you will like her.

KUZIYEV: I like her already! If a girl comes out to the Hungry Steppe with her husband-to-be, she must be a good girl!

Khafiza comes out of the hut carrying pails.

KHAFIZA: Salaam! (*Remembering that she is wearing her uncle's huge apron, she runs back into the hut.*)

KUZIYEV: Is that her? How shy she is!

Khafiza reappears without the apron.

KHAFIZA: Excuse me, but I need some water. Can you tell me where people draw water here?

KUZIYEV: It would be an honour to show you. (*Pointing*) Over there—from the canal.

KHAFIZA: So far!

KUZIYEV: Yes, it's quite a long way.

Khafiza and Dekhkanbai go off accompanied by Kuziyev. Enter Mavlon. He is shivering and again has his head wrapped in a towel. He lies down and covers himself with a blanket. Kuziyev returns.

KUZIYEV: Salaam!

MAVLON: Ah! Our bricklayer! Well, how are things going? Just come in from the fields? How did the harvesting go without your team-leader? Did you pick much?

KUZIYEV: Quite a bit.

MAVLON: How much did you pick yourself?

KUZIYEV: Oh, quite a bit. . . .

MAVLON: Pah! Only fifty kilos again! Couldn't you pick more than that? (*Covers his head with the blanket.*)

KUZIYEV: No, Mavlon. Today I didn't pick fifty. . . .

MAVLON (*raising himself*): Surely not more?

KUZIYEV: Today I picked forty-three. . . . I'm no good at picking cotton!

MAVLON: Pah! (*Covers his head with the blanket, then pokes it out again*) What are you thinking of, Kuziyev? What's your head full of?

KUZIYEV: Boards, Mavlon.

MAVLON: Pah! Yesterday it was full of bricks. Today it's full of boards!

KUZIYEV: But they've brought us such fine timber, Mavlon! And look at the way they've stacked it!

MAVLON (*losing his temper*): Oh, bother your boards! I've got to get the cotton in.

KUZIYEV: But the timber will rot!

MAVLON (*with unexpected calm*): Look here, Kuziyev, what did you join our kolkhoz for? Why did you come to the Hungry Steppe? (*His annoyance breaks out again*) Tomorrow I'll tell the chairman and he'll send you away.

KUZIYEV: But the timber will rot, Mavlon-aka!

MAVLON (*furious*): I won't wait till tomorrow. I'll tell him today. (*Gets up*) I'll tell him this minute! People in my team picking only 43 kilos! In Mavlon's team! It's a disgrace! And now he comes bothering me about boards. You're bone idle, that's what it is!

KUZIYEV (*clenching his fists*): What?

MAVLON: Bone idle! You'll never be any good in the Hungry Steppe. Take that from me! (*Goes out.*)

Enter Saltanat.

SALTANAT: Khashim, you still here?

KUZIYEV: I'm just going. . . . I'm leaving the kolkhoz, Saltanat. I'm leaving the Hungry Steppe, I'm going away altogether.

SALTANAT: Going away? But the Comsomols have just arrived.

KUZIYEV: Others may come, but I. . . . As they say in the song. . . . Oh, this is no time for songs. (*Goes off.*)

SALTANAT: Khashim is leaving. But why? Khashim leaving! . . . (*Bursts into tears.*)

Enter Adilov.

ADILOV: Tears? What has happened? Why are you crying, Saltanat?

SALTANAT (*still crying*): Khashim is going away.

ADILOV: Kuziyev? Where to?

SALTANAT (*still crying*): He's leaving the Hungry Steppe. He's going away for good.

ADILOV: So that's it. I never expected that. He seemed to be a good Comsomol member. An ex-serviceman too.

SALTANAT (*crying*): And he knows so many songs.

ADILOV: But when it came to the test, he turned out to be no good at anything else. Well, we'll have a word with Kuziyev at the Comsomol meeting.

SALTANAT (*plaintively to Adilov*): Please, talk to him.

ADILOV: I'll speak to him before the meeting. Go and find him, Saltanat.

SALTANAT: All right.

Enter Khafiza and Dekhkanbai with pails.

ADILOV: Just a minute, Saltanat. (*Pointing to Khafiza*) Is this Mavlon's niece?

SALTANAT: And that's her fiancé. (*Introducing Adilov*) This is our Party organizer. (*Runs off.*)

KHAFIZA and DEKHKANBAI: Salaam!

ADILOV: Welcome, dear comrades! Now I've met all of you. Made yourselves comfortable?

DEKHKANBAI: Khafiza's going to live with her uncle. I'm staying in the hostel. Excuse me, please. (*Carries the pails into the house.*)

ADILOV: We have to carry our water a long way.

KHAFIZA: It would be a good idea to lay a water main to the village.

ADILOV: Yes, it would. We've got a lot of things like that to do.

DEKHKANBAI (*coming out of the house*): Where's uncle? He's not indoors.

ADILOV: Your uncle doesn't look after himself. He promised me he would stay in bed today. He's a fine cotton-grower, but. . . (*Checks himself*) Well, you know him better than I do.

DEKHKANBAI: We wanted to ask if we could work in Mavlon's team. He'd make a fine commander for our offensive. . .

ADILOV: Offensive?

DEKHKANBAI: Our offensive against the Hungry Steppe.

ADILOV: I'll gladly speak to the chairman about it. We'll ask him together.

KHAFIZA: Thank you! Excuse me, I've got to go and attend to the house. . . (*Goes into the hut.*)

ADILOV: An offensive, eh? That's a good word—offensive! But some of our people are thinking of retreat.

DEKHKANBAI: Comsomol members?

ADILOV: One of them. Not one of your group. He came here earlier. His name's Kuziyev.

DEKHKANBAI: Khashim? Surely not! I was talking to him only a moment ago. He came here to build! He doesn't understand cotton but when he talks about building, his eyes really shine. He says they've brought some boards here and stacked them badly. He was very displeased, he went to the team-leader about it.

ADILOV: To Mavlon-aka? To talk about boards? Now I begin to understand I quite forgot that Kuziyev was a builder. Let him build the drying sheds. I'll look into the matter. But now tell me something about yourself. What did you do at your kolkhoz?

DEKHKANBAI: I was a cotton-grower. I was made a team-leader not long ago.

ADILOV: And how do you feel about things out here, in the Hungry Steppe?

DEKHKANBAI: I have a dream. Shall I tell you what it is?

ADILOV: If it's not a secret.

DEKHKANBAI: It's not a secret. I have talked about it to Khafiza and to the fellows in the Comsomol. It's an old dream of mine. When I was coming back from the war, we went through Moscow. I saw the Red Square, the Metro. . . I saw it all. Go and visit Kuznetsky Bridge, they told me. And when I got there

I found there was no bridge at all, and no water, just a street called Kuznetsky Bridge.

ADILOV: It's just kept its old name.

DEKHKANBAI (*enthusiastically*): Well, we want to transform the Hungry Steppe like that. So that people will be surprised when they come here. Where's the Hungry Steppe, they'll say. It's kept its old name, but the steppe is flourishing and happy. It gleams like a . . . silk suzanei.

Khafiza enters with a cooking pot and busies herself at the stove.

ADILOV: Like a silk suzanei. Excellent!

Enter Rakhimdjan. He looks very worried.

What's the matter, my dear Rakhimdjan?

RAKHIMDJAN: Trouble! Mavlon-aka is very ill. (*To Khafiza*) Your uncle's in a very bad way. He's yellow and shaking all over. He's in a fever. He couldn't even walk home.

KHAFIZA (*alarmed*): Where is he now?

RAKHIMDJAN: He's lying down in my office. Saltanat is with him.

KHAFIZA: Dekhkanbai! I'm going to see uncle. (*Runs off.*)

ADILOV: Now he's done it! Send for a doctor at once.

RAKHIMDJAN: I have already. Kuziyev's gone for one in the car.

ADILOV: No, we won't get Mavlon better out here. We must send him at once to hospital in Tashkent.

RAKHIMDJAN (*in dismay*): He'll be away for a long time now. His sector has got the biggest harvest of all and now his team will be left without a leader.

ADILOV: Yes, it won't be easy without Mavlon. Listen, Rakhimdjan. Suppose while Mavlon's ill we hand the team over to. . . .

RAKHIMDJAN: Who?

ADILOV: To Dekhkanbai!

RAKHIMDJAN: To him?

DEKHKANBAI: To me?

Curtain

SCENE II

The setting is the same as in the previous scene, but two weeks have passed. The cotton fields are bare, the cotton has been picked. It is a moonlit night.

Enter Adilov and Kuziyev.

ADILOV: All right, Khashim, I'll have a word with the chairman.

KUZIYEV (*heatedly*): It's no good at all? The kolkhoz has got its cotton in and we're starting to cultivate fresh land. But when do we start building?

ADILOV: But you built the drying sheds, didn't you? They're fine.

KUZIYEV: But we need houses for the people who've come to settle here! We need a club! And where's our building team?

ADILOV: I've told you. I'll speak to the chairman about it. Is that all?

KUZIYEV: No, it isn't! Forgive my curiosity, but I want to ask you a question. (*Unexpectedly*) Do you like music?

ADILOV (*astonished*): Yes.

KUZIYEV: Well, the kolkhoz has no musical instruments.

ADILOV: It has, there's a piano in the school.

KUZIYEV (*heatedly*): A piano's all very well, but Khashim Kuziyev needs a drum. I've promised to organize a youth orchestra, I promised Dekhkanbai, as he's the new Comsomol secretary. But what is there to play on? We haven't even got a drum!

ADILOV: All right, we'll buy one. We'll buy you five drums!

KUZIYEV (*bewildered*): But one will do. . . .

ADILOV: One won't be enough. Nobody will be able to hear it if you sing at the same time. (*Patting him on the shoulder*) That's all right, you just keep on in the same spirit. Good luck to you! You'll have your drum.

Kuziyev goes off. Adilov's attention is attracted by a passing car. He shouts and waves: "Rakhimdjan! Rakhimdjan!" Sound of the car stopping. Enter Rakhimdjan.

RAKHIMDJAN: Thanks for shouting. I might have gone by, we were driving fast. The day's over but my work isn't. I was coming from the fields.

ADILOV: How are you getting on with the pond cleaning?

RAKHIMDJAN: We'll finish it today. That's youth for you! Quick off the mark. As soon as they've finished one job they're on with the next.

ADILOV: Yes, dear Rakhimdjan, at dawn the Comsomols will be going out to the new lands.

RAKHIMDJAN: Ahead of schedule again!

ADILOV: We made no mistake over Dekhkanbai. He's a real leader.

RAKHIMDJAN: Yes, he's wonderful. Never lets his chairman rest for a moment. (*With pleasure*) And Khafiza keeps up with him—they're two halves of the same peach!

ADILOV: What about Kuziyev?

RAKHIMDJAN: Another slice of the same peach. Those sheds he built! They're a joy to look at!

ADILOV: I wanted to remind you that we promised to give Kuziyev a building team. It's time we carried out our promise.

RAKHIMDJAN: As you say, Adilov-aka! I'll tell Kuziyev today. . . .

SALTANAT'S VOICE: Rakhimdjan!

RAKHIMDJAN: Ah! Saltanat's looking for me already.

Saltanat runs in.

SALTANAT: I've been looking for you all over the village. (*Counting on her fingers*) There was a telephone call from the district water board: they want

to know how much water you will need—one. . . . The executive committee wants a report on the ponds—two. . . . The petrol's been delivered—three. . . . And I'm not going to stay in the office tomorrow, I'm going out on to the new lands with all the rest—four!

RAKHIMDJAN: Listen to me, Saltanat!

SALTANAT: If you say I mustn't, I just won't take any notice! All the Comsomols are going. And I'm a Comsomol member so I'm going too!

RAKHIMDJAN: If you won't listen to me tomorrow, listen today. Will you be seeing Kuziyev?

SALTANAT: Khashim? (*Embarrassed*) Of course, I won't. . . . do you think I see him every day?

RAKHIMDJAN: You may not see him every day, but you see him every evening.

ADILOV: May I suggest that we don't interfere in Saltanat's personal affairs?

RAKHIMDJAN: I wouldn't think of interfering in her personal affairs, but where it's a matter of the kolkhoz we will. Go and fetch Kuziyev, it's about the kolkhoz.

SALTANAT (*ticks it off on her fingers*): Kuziyev! There, I've made a note of it.

RAKHIMDJAN: You wouldn't forget Kuziyev anyway. (*Calling her back*) Just a minute, Saltanat, did you send the telegram?

SALTANAT: What telegram?

RAKHIMDJAN: A telegram. . . . (*Dismayed*) Oh dear, I meant to send it myself. (*To Adilov*) I meant to send a telegram to Mavlon in Tashkent. He's probably worrying his heart out there in hospital.

ADILOV: That's bad! I asked you to do it when we were at the district executive committee this morning. The post office is just next door.

RAKHIMDJAN: I told myself not to forget!

SALTANAT: You ought to have ticked it off on your finger, then you wouldn't have forgotten.

ADILOV: We'll have to send Saltanat specially to the post office.

RAKHIMDJAN: Shall we? (*To Saltanat*) You'll go to the post office in my car.

SALTANAT (*bending a finger*): Telegram—two. Give me the telegram. (*Takes a sheet of paper out of her case and hands it to Adilov, then switches on the light over the house.*)

ADILOV: Just a minute. (*Writes*) Tashkent. . . .

RAKHIMDJAN: (*dictating*): We congratulate you on pre-schedule completion of harvest. . . . Mavlon's team was first. Put that down. And we had better say something about the ponds.

ADILOV (*Writing*): Quite right.

SALTANAT: And say you hope he'll be better soon.

ADILOV: That's right too. Finished! Take it, Saltanat. (*Hands her the sheet.*)

SALTANAT (*puts the sheet into her case*): Don't forget about the district water board, Rakhimdjan-aka!

RAKHIMDJAN: I'll ring them from the office. (*Gets up*) You coming my way, Adilov-aka?

ADILOV: I'm off to the fields. I want to have a chat with Dekhkanbai.

SALTANAT: Here he comes.

RAKHIMDJAN: Already? Ah, that's youth for you!

Enter Dekhkanbai and Khafiza.

Salaam! What news?

DEKHKANBAI: I have to report that all the ponds have been cleaned.

RAKHIMDJAN: How they work! Like fire! Type out the report, Saltanat! (*To the driver off stage*) Karim! Off you go to the office.

Rakhimdjan and Saltanat go off. Sound of the car leaving.

ADILOV: Congratulations, dear Dekhkanbai. And congratulations to you, too, Khafiza. So the offensive continues. . . .

DEKHKANBAI: Along the whole front.

ADILOV: Excellent, my dear Dekhkanbai. By the way, I asked you to think about the organization of study groups for our young people.

KHAFIZA: We'll have to organize two groups. The older collective farmers want to study too. Even the old folk.

DEKHKANBAI (*teasing Khafiza*): And even—old women!

KHAFIZA (*to Dekhkanbai*): There you go with your "old women" again! They're not old, they're just elderly.

DEKHKANBAI: Of course they're elderly. . . . Elderly old women.

KHAFIZA: Don't listen to him, Adilov-aka! They're quite young old women! Honestly! They'll be working in the silk-growing team.

ADILOV (*surprised*): What team?

KHAFIZA: The silk-growing team.

ADILOV: But we have no such team.

KHAFIZA: We'll have one this spring. All our girls have agreed. We'll put it up to the board. Will you support us?

DEKHKANBAI: It's an interesting idea, Adilov-aka.

ADILOV: We'll certainly discuss it.

KHAFIZA: And I've got some other things to see you about. So many I just don't know where to begin.

ADILOV: Then I'll begin myself. Have you had supper?

KHAFIZA: We were just thinking about it.

ADILOV: Well, start with that.

KHAFIZA: No, we'll have time for that later. Now about the silk-growing.

ADILOV: No silk-growing on an empty stomach. You're both starving, I'm sure.

DEKHKANBAI: To be honest, I could eat a sheep.

ADILOV: Did you hear that, Khafiza?

KHAFIZA (*running into the hut*): I'll cook some meat dumplings. It won't take long.

Voices are heard singing in the distance.

DEKHKANBAI: The Andizhan people.

ADILOV: They come from the same place as you, don't they?

DEKHKANBAI: They can't sleep. . . . They're preparing for battle.

ADILOV: Yes, this is the night before battle.

DEKHKANBAI: I'm sorry Mavlon is still sick. We'll be going out on to the new land without him tomorrow. He knows the Hungry Steppe so well. After all, we're only novices here.

ADILOV: Everybody has been a novice at some time or other in the Hungry Steppe, even Mavlon was once. I hope you'll soon be called not novices but innovators. I've been talking to a soil specialist. He's very keen on that drainage idea.

DEKHKANBAI: Some more proposals have come in from our young people.

ADILOV: What are they?

DEKHKANBAI: If we were to dig ponds . . . but I could explain it better with a soil map. There's one hanging up in uncle's house. Shall we have a look at it?

ADILOV: Let's.

They go into the hut.

SALTANAT'S VOICE: Adilov! Adilov!

Saltanat runs in.

SALTANAT: Adilov-aka! (*She runs up to the hut and knocks at the door*) May I come in?

KHAFIZA'S VOICE: Come in, Saltanat.

Saltanat goes into the hut. Kuziyev runs in.

KUZIYEV: Saltanat! (*Hearing Saltanat's laughter*) I'll wait for her here.

SALTANAT'S VOICE: Good-bye.

Saltanat comes out and stops by the hut.

SALTANAT: Now what other jobs have I got to do? (*Ticking them off on her fingers*) Send a telegram to Mavlon-aka. . . . Call on the agronomist. . . . Find Khashim. . . . (*She sighs*) But where is he, my Khashim? He'll be building now. (*Delightedly*). What wonderful drying sheds he built! And he's so wonderful too!

KUZIYEV: I've been searching and searching for you all the evening, my joy!

SALTANAT: And I've been searching for you too. All over the village. (*Changing her tone*). On kolkhoz matters of course. Don't think. . . .

KUZIYEV: I'm not thinking anything.

SALTANAT (*sadly*): But I think you have stopped thinking about me.

KUZIYEV: My joy! I think of you day and night. As the poet said: "No matter where you are, my heart is with you!"

SALTANAT: It's a nice night.

KUZIYEV: And what about me?

SALTANAT: You're nice too.

KUZIYEV: Dearest heart! (*Takes Saltanat's hand.*)

SALTANAT (*alarmed*): You musn't hold that hand. I'll get all my jobs mixed up. You see, this finger says call on the agronomist, this one is for the telegram, and this one is for Khashim.

KUZIYEV: For me? (*He kisses it.*)

SALTANAT (*tenderly*): The chairman wants you. You're to get together a building team. You've been appointed team-leader.

KUZIYEV (*startled*): Already?

SALTANAT (*alarmed*): Have you been bitten by a scorpion?

KUZIYEV: What scorpion?! Did you say we're going to have a building team? Why, it's like in that song. . . . (*Kisses Saltanat*) Like that. . . . (*Runs off.*)

SALTANAT (*looks sadly at her hand*): Now he's mixed up all my jobs. . . . That was the telegram, and that . . . that was. . . . (*Remembers*) I haven't been to the agronomist yet. (*Runs off.*)

A pause. Enter Mavlon with a suitcase. He goes slowly towards the hut and stops as he hears the voice of Saltanat singing as she hurries back.

SALTANAT'S VOICE:

Where have I lost my heart,
Three long days I've sought . . .

(SALTANAT *runs in continuing the song*):

I don't want my darling
To scold my careless thought. . . .

SALTANAT (*seeing Mavlon*): Who's there?

MAVLON: Salaam, Saltanat!

SALTANAT (*amazed*): Mavlon-aka? But you . . . you were in Tashkent.

MAVLON: I might as well be in Tashkent if I'm not getting in the harvest. But why are you running about at this time of night? Why aren't you in bed?

SALTANAT: On a night like this. . . . No one's sleeping tonight.

MAVLON: No one asleep? Ah, I see. The harvest's going badly. Mavlon fell ill at the wrong time indeed.

SALTANAT: Oh no, Mavlon-aka, the harvest is going fine.

MAVLON: Don't try to reassure me. I know things are bad. It's bad on my sector!

SALTANAT: But it isn't! Everything's fine. We even wanted to send you a telegram.

MAVLON: A telegram? What about?

SALTANAT: To you, Mavlon-aka. (*Showing it to him*) From the chairman and the Party organizer.

MAVLON: To me? Show me. . . . (*He takes the sheet of paper and goes under the electric lamp hanging in front of the house to read it.*)

SALTANAT: I'll run and tell the chairman. Rakhimdjan will be surprised!
(Runs off.)

MAVLON (reading): "We congratulate you on pre-schedule completion of harvest. . . ." So they've got it in? Got it in without me? Impossible! . . . They just wanted to set my mind at rest. Yes, that's what they say: "Get better soon." Ah! They gave me sleeping pills in hospital, but it was no use! I'm sure they couldn't have got the harvest in without me!

Khafiza comes out of the hut.

KHAFIZA (seeing Mavlon): Uncle?! Salaam! How did you get here? You're out before your time, I expect? You aren't well yet, are you?

MAVLON: Don't shout at me, Khafiza! The doctor shouted at me, the professor shouted, and now you are shouting. Sit down. . . . (Uncertainly) Listen, Saltanat blurted it out to me. No, that isn't quite the right word. . . . Tell me the truth. . . . Are you in a bad way with the harvest?

KHAFIZA: I don't understand you, uncle.

MAVLON: What place is my team in?

KHAFIZA: The first. They got their cotton in before anyone else. The whole kolkhoz got in the harvest before time.

MAVLON: First place?! Mavlon's team is first?!

KHAFIZA: Yes, of course, uncle!

MAVLON: So Saltanat. . . . So it's true what the telegram says? For two weeks I lay in hospital thinking my team would be lagging behind. It was raining, I was sure the quality would be spoiled. . . . My authority, Mavlon's authority as a team-leader would be weakened, his reputation ruined!

KHAFIZA: How can you say such things, uncle!

MAVLON: But my team's got the first place! The doctor couldn't cure me, but you have cured me! Tell me how it happened.

KHAFIZA: We'll tell you all about it in a minute. I'll just call Dekhkanbai. (Going into the hut.) Dekhkanbai! Uncle's here.

MAVLON (alone): Her young man in the house before the wedding? I never agreed to that.

Adilov, Dekhkanbai and Khafiza come out of the hut.

ADILOV: Salaam, dear Mavlon! An unexpected guest!

DEKHKANBAI: Congratulations on your recovery, uncle! Salaam!

Rakhimdjan hurries in.

RAKHIMDJAN: Salaam! Well again already? Pre-schedule recovery, eh? Everything in our kolkhoz is done ahead of schedule.

MAVLON: Sit down, sit down all of you. Thank you, friends, for thinking of your team-leader, for the telegram and congratulations you sent him.

RAKHIMDJAN (embarrassed): It was my fault, Mavlon! I forgot to send it off.

MAVLON: You forgot? But I received it all the same.

RAKHIMDJAN: How did you manage that?

MAVLON: Here it is.

RAKHIMDJAN: You've got it already!

ADILOV: Yes, dear Rakhimdjan, Saltanat's telegrams arrive quickly.

RAKHIMDJAN: Ahead of schedule again! Lightning!

MAVLON: Tell me, dear friends, tell me how my team got first place without me?

RAKHIMDJAN: They picked all their cotton, dried it all, and delivered it. And not a gramme was wasted. It's Dekhkanbai you should thank

MAVLON: Dekhkanbai?

ADILOV: Dekhkanbai took over for you. He made a fine team-leader.

MAVLON: My niece's fiancé?! (*To Dekhkanbai*) You?

DEKHKANBAI: Yes, uncle! And now we're getting ready to. . . .

MAVLON: You're getting ready? (*Laughs confidently*) Now your team-leader has arrived, he'll do the getting ready.

KHAFIZA: But it's some new job we're going to take up. . . .

DEKHKANBAI: We're getting ready. . . .

MAVLON: Well, enough of that. We won't talk about work today. We'll leave that till tomorrow. And tomorrow we'll be ready.

KHAFIZA: No, uncle, we must do it today.

MAVLON (*good-naturedly*): Disobeying your uncle?! You can disobey your uncle, but not your team-leader! While I was in hospital I never stopped thinking about the kolkhoz, my heart bled. . . . Now I want to have one peaceful night. Mavlon will have his first good night's sleep in the Hungry Steppe. Today's a holiday for me, my team's got first place. I want you to celebrate it with me.

ADILOV (*exchanging glances with Dekhkanbai*): Perhaps we'll celebrate another time, dear Mavlon?

KHAFIZA: Of course, another time, uncle.

DEKHKANBAI: We've got a lot to do today.

MAVLON (*frowning*): Would you insult Mavlon?

RAKHIMDJAN (*hastily*): We'll stay a little while, we wouldn't offend our team-leader. Why should we?

MAVLON: Thank you, friends. Hurry, Khafiza! Fill the jugs with wine. We will treat our guests!

Khafiza goes into the hut.

KUZIYEV'S VOICE: Dekhkanbai! Dekhkanbai!

Enter Kuziyev.

KUZIYEV (*seeing Mavlon*): Mavlon-aka? You're back?

MAVLON: Ah, the bricklayer! Are you still here? (*To Rakhimdjan*) I asked you to send him away from the kolkhoz. (*To Dekhkanbai*) Dekhkanbai! Why did you keep this idler in the team?

RAKHIMDJAN: Now then, you shouldn't use words like that!

DEKHKANBAI: He's no idler!

MAVLON: Just a minute, Dekhkanbai! You were team-leader, now I am team-leader. (*To Adilov*) They're undermining my authority. (*To Rakhimdjani*) I want an answer: why are you keeping an idler in the kolkhoz?

RAKHIMDJAN: But it was only a quarrel between you two! Why remember it now! Let bygones be bygones.

DEKHKANBAI: You were in the wrong, Mavlon-aka!

MAVLON: In the wrong? A team-leader in the wrong! I say Kuziyev is an idler! He doesn't like cotton, doesn't think about cotton. He keeps chattering about bricks, and singing songs. (*To Kuziyev*) Aren't I right?

KUZIYEV: No, you are not, Mavlon-aka! I do think about cotton.

MAVLON (*contemptuously*): You think!

ADILOV (*rising*): Listen, dear Mavlon-aka. How do you think we managed to dry the cotton? Have you seen the new drying sheds?

MAVLON: New drying sheds?

RAKHIMDJAN: And what sheds! They're a joy to look at!

MAVLON: You've built new drying sheds! Who built them?

DEKHKANBAI: The idler.

MAVLON: Kuziyev? (*To Kuziyev*) Did you build them?

KUZIYEV: Yes, I did. Out of the boards that would have gone rotten. Remember?

DEKHKANBAI (*to Mavlon*): And you call him an idler, who only sings songs.

KUZIYEV: That's right. Just as the song says: "A song helps us to live and build."

Khafiza brings in food and wine. Dekhkanbai assists her.

MAVLON: He's a regular singing bird, isn't he!

RAKHIMDJAN: Kuziyev is going to be one of our team-leaders.

MAVLON: A team-leader!

RAKHIMDJAN: He may not know much about cotton, but he knows all about bricks.

MAVLON: Oho! A bricklayers' team-leader!

ADILOV (*firmly*): Leader of the building team!

MAVLON: Well, let him. I don't mind. (*To Kuziyev*). Come on, team-leader. Don't be afraid. Drink a bowl of wine to Mavlon! Sit down, my dear guests.

They all take their seats.

Kuziyev, you be the master of ceremonies. Pour out the wine. . . . I made it myself from water-melon. It's not just anybody's, it's Mavlon's wine! What shall our first toast be?

RAKHIMDJAN: To our best team-leader!

ADILOV: To you, Mavlon-aka!

KHAFIZA: To uncle!

DEKHKANBAI: To our commander's return!

KUZIYEV: Your health! (*Drinks and splutters*) That must have been a good water-melon!

MAVLON: Thank you . . . thank you! (*To Khafiza*) What have we to offer our honoured guests?

KHAFIZA (*removes the napkin from the dish*): Look and see.

MAVLON: Meat-dumplings! Khafiza knows what food to give her uncle! Eat, dear guests! Ah, they're too good to eat! They just melt in your mouth! Why didn't I eat anything in the hospital? Because they gave me medicine instead of dumplings. (*Noticing that Rakhimdjan does not eat*) Why aren't you eating, Rakhimdjan-aka?

RAKHIMDJAN: I'm very stout. . . . And dumplings don't make you thin. (*With sudden abandon*) All right, I'll just try a few!

MAVLON: Fill up the bowls. . . . Now let us drink to our white gold! To our cotton!

KUZIYEV (*sings*):

Let's drink to our land, where all peoples are brothers,
Let's drink to the fields that our labour has won,
Let's drink to our children's laughter and fun.

Everybody takes up the chorus.

Fill up the bowls and let our song ring,
Of a land that's happy and free we sing.

Enter Saltanat.

MAVLON: Sit down, Saltanat! Have some dumplings with us.

SALTANAT: Excuse me. I must speak to the chairman.

RAKHIMDJAN (*jokingly*): Never a moment's rest. . . .

SALTANAT (*to Rakhimdjan*): You haven't signed the report on the ponds. (*Handing him the report.*) I've got to hand it in to the district executive committee.

RAKHIMDJAN (*signing*): I don't mind signing a report like that. It's a pleasure! Finished cleaning the ponds ahead of schedule.

MAVLON: If the chairman will allow me, I should like to see the report too—just a glance.

RAKHIMDJAN: Our team-leader shall have that pleasure! (*Hands him the report*) It's a fine report. Your team has first place here too.

Mavlon reads the report and frowns.

But I see no joy on Mavlon's face.

MAVLON (*returning the report*): I have read the report. It is not my team that is on top of the list.

KHAFIZA: Not yours! I don't understand.

RAKHIMDJAN (*reads hurriedly*): First place . . . belongs to the team of—Dekhkanbai. . . . (*Checks himself, turning to Saltanat*) Mavlon's team, not Dekhkanbai's!

SALTANAT: I've been typing it like that for two weeks now.

RAKHIMDJAN (*to Saltanat*): Mavlon was away, but now Mavlon has returned.

DEKHKANBAI (*to Mavlon*): Saltanat made a mistake.

KHAFIZA: Of course, uncle, it was just Saltanat's mistake.

RAKHIMDJAN: Oh dear, our team-leader's upset.

ADILOV: It's nothing very terrible. Saltanat can retype the report.

SALTANAT: Of course, I will, Mavlon-aka! (*Runs off.*)

RAKHIMDJAN: Saltanat will retype it and we'll hand it in with your name on it.

ADILOV: Let's have a song, Khashim.

KUZIYEV (*sings*):

The wine in our bowls is red as a flower,
Comrades, let's drink to the health of our people,
To the wonderful age we are living in now.

All take up the chorus except Mavlon.

Fill up our bowls, let our song ring. . . .

MAVLON: I want to say a word. The team that got the cotton in ahead of time, that cleaned the ponds first was. . . (*Emphatically*) Dekhkanbai's!

KHAFIZA: Uncle!

DEKHKANBAI: Why say that?

RAKHIMDJAN: It's your team, Mavlon-aka! Your team!

MAVLON: But the man who is going to start cultivating the new lands—and cultivating them ahead of schedule!—is not just anybody, but I—Mavlon! Tomorrow we shall go out in the fields. . . .

RAKHIMDJAN: Ah, our team-leader doesn't know anything yet.

KHAFIZA: That's what we wanted to tell you about.

DEKHKANBAI: We're making a start on the new lands. We begin first thing in the morning.

KUZIYEV: We're going to cultivate the Comsomol fields.

ADILOV: Yes, dear Mavlon-aka, Dekhkanbai is leading the young people in a new offensive.

MAVLON (*puzzled*): I don't understand. Comsomol fields? Dekhkanbai leading an offensive! . . .

DEKHKANBAI: Let me explain, uncle. We're going to start on the marsh which is on the other side of the clover field.

MAVLON: On the other side of the clover? That's not my sector. That's the third team's sector.

DEKHKANBAI: Quite right.

ADILOV: It's a difficult sector. We hadn't planned to cultivate it this year. But Dekhkanbai proposed starting on it right away.

DEKHKANBAI: We'll beat that marsh if we all go at it together. All the Comsomol members will turn out to do the drainage.

KHAFIZA: We'll win another two hectares. Over and above the plan!
ADILOV: It's a fine idea!

RAKHIMDJAN: Above plan is always a fine plan.

MAVLON (*frowning*): Dekhkanbai suggested it, did he? My team is to work on the third team's land. But what about my land?

DEKHKANBAI: We're starting ahead of plan. We'll have time to do our own as well.

MAVLON: I see it all. . . . And I don't agree!

DEKHKANBAI: Why not?

MAVLON: It was you who got the cotton in first, but it'll be Mavlon who'll be last to get his land cultivated. Mavlon's team will be at the bottom of the list.

DEKHKANBAI: No, it won't. I promise you that, uncle!

RAKHIMDJAN: If Dekhkanbai promises something there's no need to worry. Kuziyev! I haven't heard your voice for a long time.

KUZIYEV (*lifting his bowl, sings*):

I'll drain this bowl, comrade, drain it to the dregs.

And another bowl I'll fill, comrade. . . .

MAVLON (*interrupting the song*): Dekhkanbai will cultivate two hectares for the third team. . . .

DEKHKANBAI: I won't do it alone.

KHAFIZA: All the Comsomol members will do it.

MAVLON (*to Khafiza*): Be quiet and let your elders speak! And on my land . . . on my sector . . . I will cultivate three hectares above plan. And it's not just anybody promising that, it's Mavlon! (*Lifting his bowl, to Kuziyev*) Now you can sing, Kuziyev.

They all look at one another. A pause. Mavlon is surprised at the silence.

ADILOV (*cautiously*): Well, that's very good . . . very good indeed. But you're a little late, dear Mavlon-aka.

KHAFIZA: Our team has already pledged itself to cultivate five hectares of land above the plan.

MAVLON: Five?! (*To Dekhkanbai*) Was that your proposal too?

DEKHKANBAI: It was the Comsomols' proposal.

RAKHIMDJAN: Ah, that's youth for you! Quick off the mark!

MAVLON (*to Dekhkanbai*): Not a single team-leader would agree to such a proposal. Five hectares above plan!

DEKHKANBAI: You're wrong, uncle.

MAVLON (*furiously*): Who's wrong?! Mavlon?! Just try it, try and cultivate an extra five hectares. Do it without me! Cultivate the land alone. . . .

DEKHKANBAI: I shan't be alone. The whole team will be doing it, and you will, too!

MAVLON: I, too? Huh!

RAKHIMDJAN: There's no need to worry, Mavlon-aka! You'll do not five but six hectares! With the people your team has got now! (*Lifts his bowl*) A last toast—to our success!

KUZIYEV (*lifts his bowl and sings*):

Fill up your bowls and sing a song. . . .

MAVLON (*interrupting the song*): To our success? To Dekhkanbai's success?! (*Turns his bowl upside down*) Excuse me, I've just come out of hospital. I mustn't drink any more.

KHAFIZA (*quietly*): Uncle!

A pause. Everyone is astonished.

ADILOV: Yes, perhaps it wasn't a very good idea to drink today, Mavlon-aka.

MAVLON: Let my guests drink. . . . (*Sarcastically*) It is Mavlon's feast. . . . Fill up the bowls, Kuziyev. There's plenty of wine.

KUZIYEV (*showing him the empty jug*): There's none left.

MAVLON (*rising*): I'll bring some more. Drink! Drink to Dekhkanbai's success! (*Goes into the hut.*)

A pause.

RAKHIMDJAN: I must go.

SALTANAT'S VOICE: Rakhimdjan!

RAKHIMDJAN: There's Saltanat looking for me again. (*Rises.*)

Saltanat runs in

SALTANAT (*ticking off jobs on her fingers*): I've retyped the report—one. I've sent it to the district executive committee—two. The ditchers from the MTS have arrived—three.

RAKHIMDJAN: We'll use those ditchers tomorrow. . . . Come on, Dekhkanbai.

ADILOV (*gets up, to Rakhimdjan*): May I keep you for a few minutes. We'll ask Khashim and Khafiza to help Dekhkanbai. (*To Khafiza and Kuziyev*) Would you mind? We'll follow on afterwards.

Rather surprised, Khafiza, Kuziyev, Dekhkanbai and Saltanat go off. Adilov waits till they have gone.

It looks bad, dear Rakhimdjan.

RAKHIMDJAN: Perhaps he came out of hospital too soon? Perhaps he hasn't got over his malaria yet?

ADILOV: It's another disease, I'm afraid. (*Thoughtfully*) We cleanse the earth of the salt marshes but we don't yet know how to cleanse people of the bitter salt that's been in them for centuries!

RAKHIMDJAN (*with conviction*): Never mind! The land will grow new, and men will grow new with it.

ADILOV: I want to talk to Mavlon—alone. Do you approve?
RAKHIMDJAN (*anxiously*): Yes, speak to him but don't tell him off. He can't bear that, he's an old man. Do you promise?
ADILOV: I'll try.

Rakhimdjani goes off. A short pause. The night is waning fast. Adilov turns out the light in front of the hut. Mavlon appears with wine.

MAVLON: Much wine, but the guests are few!

ADILOV: Saltanat came along about something urgent.

MAVLON (*sarcastically*): Urgent affairs. Has Dekhkanbai urgent affairs?

ADILOV: Yes, Dekhkanbai has great tasks to accomplish.

MAVLON (*sarcastically*): I hear nothing but "Dekhkanbai" these days. (*Angrily*) "The foal may gallop but it's the horse that pulls the cart!"

ADILOV: There's another saying besides that: "Wisdom is not in the beard but in the head." You see, dear Mavlon, these young people have come here with great plans for the future. And we hope, we very much hope that you will help the young folk with your experience and your authority.

MAVLON (*gloomily*): Dekhkanbai has authority. . . . Kuzyev has authority. They have wisdom, I have only a beard.

ADILOV: You've got a good beard, Mavlon, and an even better head. Don't turn away from the young generation. Have a good look at them and perhaps you will even learn something from them.

MAVLON (*furiously*): Who is Mavlon to learn from? From those fledglings! I was the first man here to till the earth. I achieved record harvests. I, Mavlon!

ADILOV (*calmly*): Did you do it yourself? Or with the help of your team? It was with the help of the whole kolkhoz. I would even say with the help of the whole country.

MAVLON: That's not what I'm arguing about.

ADILOV: What are you arguing about then? Tell me. . . . (*A pause*) I am waiting for you to tell me.

MAVLON (*evasively*): Excuse me, I don't feel very well yet. I mustn't drink much, or talk much either.

ADILOV: That won't do, Mavlon. It won't do at all. Are you dissatisfied? If so, speak. There's no need to be silent and there's no need to shout. When a leader raises his voice, he forgets his authority. A tractor makes much more noise when its fuel's running out, and then it stops altogether! Think over my words! I wish you well. (*He goes off.*)

Mavlon sits gloomily at the table. Pours out some wine and is about to drink when Khafiza enters with Dekhkanbai, Saltanat and Kuzyev.

KHAFIZA (*going up to Mavlon*): Still not in bed, uncle?

MAVLON: No, I'm sitting here. . . . (*Bitterly*) all alone. And I thought we should all live as one family.

KHAFIZA: That's what we want, uncle.

MAVLON: Do you?

DEKHKANBAI: Of course.

MAVLON: I don't know what your wishes are. (*Picks up the bowl*) Say your wish, Khafiza, and I will drink this bowl to its fulfilment.

KHAFIZA: Very well, I will tell you. (*Raises the bowl*) To the new lands that our kolkhoz will cultivate in the Hungry Steppe.

MAVLON: To the Comsomol fields?!

KHAFIZA: Yes.

MAVLON: I see. You want honour, applause, praise—and my authority can go to hell?!

SALTANAT: Excuse me, Mavlon-aka, but why are you always talking about "my authority," "my team". . . .

MAVLON: You keep quiet, secretary. Use your typewriter and not your tongue.

KUZIYEV: Saltanat is quite right.

DEKHKANBAI (*gently*): Saltanat meant to say that we should feel as strongly as you about our team, about the interests of the whole kolkhoz, the whole country. After all, we are building communism together.

MAVLON: But perhaps I want to get my team to communism first!

KUZIYEV (*philosophically*): You can't build a house with only one nail.

MAVLON: Nail? What nail? Who's a nail?

DEKHKANBAI: I am . . . Saltanat is. . . . You are.

MAVLON (*jumping up*): I—a nail!

DEKHKANBAI: You misunderstood me, Mavlon-aka.

MAVLON: I see it all! And see it very well! A bit here, a bit there! You want to become team-leader instead of me! I watered this land with my own sweat, and now I am called a nail? A rusty nail! Well, just try to pull that nail out!

KHAFIZA: Be calm, uncle. Please be calm!

MAVLON (*furious*): Get out of my house. You've come here with your man to humiliate me! You shall never be the wife of this half-baked greenhorn. I say so—I, Mavlon! That's not what you came to me for.

DEKHKANBAI: We didn't come here just to be with you. We came here to work at the kolkhoz.

MAVLON: What? To the kolkhoz. So you want to stir up the kolkhoz against me, do you!

KHAFIZA: Uncle! What are you saying?

MAVLON: I'm no uncle of yours and you're no niece of mine! Remember this: I'm a team-leader and you're under me. My team will go out tomorrow to till the new land! And you will go with my team!

DEKHKANBAI: She will go with the Comsomols!

MAVLON (*to Dekhkanbai*): You can go where you like. I'm going to take my own team to my own land. I'm the team-leader. Mavlon is the team-leader! (*He stamps into the hut, leaving the door open behind him.*)

KHAFIZA: Uncle! (*She runs after him.*)

The door slams in her face. She bursts into tears, leaning against the wall.

DEKHKANBAI: Never mind, Khafiza. . . . Don't cry. You can live with Saltanat for the time being.

SALTANAT: Of course, Khafiza. Come and live with me.

A Comsomol song is heard.

KUZIYEV: Do you hear? The young people are going out into the steppe. Come on, friends!

DEKHKANBAI (*to Khafiza*): Do you hear them? The offensive has started. Come, Khafiza.

KUZIYEV: As the song says. . . .

In the growing light of dawn Khafiza, Dekhkanbai, Kuziyev and Saltanat take up the song, waving to the young people in the distance.

Curtain

ACT THREE

The same village. Most of the stage is taken up by the verandah in front of the kolkhoz office. A window gives out on to the verandah. Within, near the window, there is a table with a telephone on it. On the verandah stand two small tables (on one there is an abacus) and several stools. A letter-box is fixed to the wall of the office. Above the verandah hangs the notice: NEW LAND KOLKHOZ MANAGEMENT OFFICE. There is a ladder leaning against the wall. Dekhkanbai, who is standing on the ladder, and Khafiza are fixing up a strip of red bunting that bears the words: "Salaam, dear guests!" On the ground lies another strip, on which Saltanat is completing an inscription. A band is practising somewhere close by.

DEKHKANBAI (*about to nail up the bunting*): Saltanat!

KHAFIZA: Look, Saltanat! Is it straight?

SALTANAT: A little bit lower! A little bit more! That's it!

DEKHKANBAI: What about my end?

SALTANAT: Nail it!

Dekhkanbai and Khafiza bang with their hammers. The band stops playing. Kuziyev runs in with a conductor's baton in his hand.

KUZIYEV: How many times have I asked you, begged you! The kolkhoz is going to be presented with a banner. We are going to receive guests, delegations from all over the district. And the band can't even play a flourish properly yet!

SALTANAT: And we haven't got the office decorated yet. And the school's got to be decorated as well.

KUZIYEV: Got to be! Got to be! (*Runs over to the window, takes a SILENCE PLEASE! notice that must have been hanging over the table and hangs it up in full view.*) Do you see that? Well, kindly take notice.

SALTANAT: I won't do anything of the kind.

DEKHKANBAI: Don't waste time, Saltanat.

SALTANAT: Well, he can stop giving orders. Being engaged to a man is not the same as being his wife—one. . . .

KUZIYEV (*going away*): And being engaged to a woman is not the same as being her husband—two. (*Goes off.*)

SALTANAT: If I don't want to, I shan't be your wife—three!

The band blares out deafeningly. Khafiza and Dekhkanbai have already nailed up the strip.

DEKHKANBAI (*going over to Saltanat*): Well, how's it going? Let me help you. (*Bends over the second strip and finishes the final letters.*)

SALTANAT (*going up to Khafiza*): Shall we celebrate our weddings together, Khafiza? Both on the same day?

KHAFIZA: Yes.

DEKHKANBAI: Well, that's that. Give me a hand, Saltanat.

Dekhkanbai and Saltanat nail up the second strip, which bears the inscription: "Forward to new victories!" Khafiza watches them.

KHAFIZA: Higher, Dekhkanbai! Yes, that's good!

The band blares out and the hammers bang simultaneously. The band stops playing. Kuziyev runs in. Without a word he takes the hammers away from Saltanat and Dekhkanbai, puts them in his pockets and goes out.

DEKHKANBAI: Hi! What are we going to knock the nails in with? (*Climbing down the ladder.*) Oh well, it doesn't matter. It'll stay up as it is.

He carries the ladder away and comes back. The band blares out again. Enter Adilov.

ADILOV (*in the direction of the band*): Salaam, Khashim! Keep it up!

DEKHKANBAI: Salaam, Adilov-aka! What do you think of it?

ADILOV: Everything ready for our guests? Good work! We'll soon be sending you all to study at an art school.

SALTANAT: An art school? But I want to be a tractor-driver!

DEKHKANBAI: Yes, Comrade Party Organizer, the Comsomol committee has taken a decision to send Saltanat to a tractor-driver's course.

Saltanat and Khafiza are busy making up bunches of flowers on the verandah.

ADILOV: Yes, I know. Rakhimdjan is upset. He thinks he'll never find such a good secretary again.

Adilov and Dekhkanbai sit down at one of the tables.

DEKHKANBAI: By the way, have a look at the list of the Comsomol members we are sending off to the mechanization of agriculture school. (*Shows him a list.*)

ADILOV (*looking through it*): Saltanat! Did you call on Mavlon?

SALTANAT: Yes. He won't be at the celebration. He says he's still ill.

KHAFIZA (*to Saltanat*): I feel so ashamed of my uncle, so ashamed! He hardly seems to be one of us any more. It's lucky mother doesn't know about it. If she got to know I am living with you instead of uncle. . . .

SALTANAT: Yes, it's a pity he took it like that.

DEKHKANBAI (*to Adilov*): What shall we do about Mavlon?

ADILOV: His illness seems to be lasting a long time. . . . A severe attack of obstinacy and vanity. We still don't know how to cure those diseases properly. (*Changing the subject*) Well, never mind. When are you going to decorate the school?

DEKHKANBAI: Rakhimdjan said he would bring some posters. . . . He promised to be here by twelve.

Sound of a car.

ADILOV: And here he is.

DEKHKANBAI (*to Khafiza and Saltanat*): Let's give the chairman a Comsomol greeting.

ALL (*chanting*): Ra-khim-djan! Sa-laam! Sa-laam! Sa-laam!

Enter Rakhimdjan loaded with parcels.

RAKHIMDJAN: Thanks for the greeting! I've bought everything—flags, slogans, posters! (*Hands over the parcels to Saltanat and Khafiza, who carry them into the office*) It makes your heart glad! I haven't got out of the car for six hours. (*To Adilov*) But it's bad for me to go about in the car all the time while the Party organizer has to walk.

ADILOV: I like walking. It keeps me from getting fat, dear Rakhimdjan.

KHAFIZA (*appearing at the window*): Comrade Adilov! Would you mind coming in for a moment.

Adilov goes into the office.

RAKHIMDJAN: That was one at me. I'm putting on weight. (*Pats his stomach.*) You can't hide the moon. . . . (*To the driver off stage*) Karim! Take the car back to the garage. I'll walk home today. . . . Yes, I'm getting fat. But why?

DEKHKANBAI: You ought to eat less pilau.

RAKHIMDJAN: I haven't eaten pilau for six months. Joy makes me fat. (*Flicking the beads of the abacus*) We sowed the cotton—I got fatter. We harvested the cotton—I got fatter still. Now we shall cultivate the new land and soon you will have to carry your chairman about on a lorry, with a trailer for his stomach. (*Band plays.*) How well they play! Nice and loud! Play that again, Kuziyev! (*Another flourish*) Enough to deafen anyone!

ADILOV (*coming out of the office*): We must hurry, or our guests will arrive before we are ready.

Saltanat and Khafiza come in with posters and flags.

DEKHKANBAI: Who's coming with us? We're going to do the school.

RAKHIMDJAN: Are you coming, Adilov-aka?

ADILOV (*going over to the window*): Just a minute, I want to ring the district committee. (*Picks up the receiver.*)

RAKHIMDJAN: Tell them there'll be a meeting of celebration at seven.

Rakhimdjani, Saltanat and Khafiza go off.

ADILOV (*speaking into the phone*): Gulnar, put me through to the district committee, please. This is Adilov from the New Land Kolkhoz.

Band plays.

No, the festivities haven't started yet. That's the band practising. Yes, our own band, conducted by Khashim Kuziyev.

Enter Mavlon slowly. His face is gloomy. Seeing Adilov, he turns away.

There'll be a meeting at seven. You'll come earlier? We'll meet you. (*Noticing Mavlon*) Excuse me, I'll ring again later. Something urgent. (*Puts down the receiver*) Salaam, Mavlon-aka! I am glad to see you. Greetings on our holiday! How are you feeling?

MAVLON: I'm still ill.

ADILOV: Keeping to your bed?

MAVLON: Malaria. . .

ADILOV: Yes, of course. With malaria you are supposed to stay in bed. So you stay in bed during the day, and at night (*eyeing Mavlon closely*) . . . at night you go for a walk? Is that so, dear Mavlon?

MAVLON: I felt better one night. I went out to . . . to the rice fields.

ADILOV: Well, I suppose that's possible. You may have been to the rice fields. But I was on the Comsomol fields and I saw you there. What do you say to that?

MAVLON (*sullenly*): Huh. . . You needn't have dug those ponds so deep.

ADILOV: Yes, Mavlon, but you're rather late with your advice. You ought to have advised Dekhkanbai earlier.

MAVLON: I'm not Dekhkanbai's adviser. A nail doesn't advise the pincers how to pull it out. A rusty nail!

ADILOV: I've heard about that nail before. But we weren't talking about a rusty nail, we were talking about the place of your team in our general task of construction. It wasn't a bad comparison, there was no need to take offence. And it's high time you forgot it.

MAVLON: I wasn't just offended, I was deeply wounded. They have spat on me. No, that's not quite the word.

ADILOV: No, it isn't. But there is a good word—criticism! Just criticism. That makes two good words. Listen to criticism—that makes three; respond to just criticism—there are four good words for you.

MAVLON: I've heard plenty of words. . . . Dekhkanbai's words mostly.

ADILOV: And his deeds? Have you seen his deeds? The kolkhoz has gained another two hectares of land. . . . And tomorrow Dekhkanbai will start on your rough land.

MAVLON (*staggered*): Dekhkanbai again?!

ADILOV: The team-leader is ill. He has malaria. Dekhkanbai has had experience of running your team.

MAVLON (*to himself*): So that's what Dekhkanbai is after now.

ADILOV: Now look here, Mavlon-aka. When you fell ill, really ill, I made you go to hospital. But now I advise you to get well. Can't you see? The arrival of the Comsomols has made everything younger.

MAVLON: Everybody's got younger, only Mavlon has aged. Mavlon's not needed any more.

Enter Rakhimdjan, Dekhkanbai and Saltanat.

RAKHIMDJAN: Adilov-aka! That's youth for you! Quick off the mark! They've done the school, everything's ready. Ready ahead of schedule! Now we'll have to go and change. We must dress up to meet our guests! (*Noticing Mavlon, he falls silent.*)

Sultanat and Dekhkanbai go into the office.

ADILOV: Just a minute. . . . We'll decide who is to take the banner and make the answering speech. (*Mavlon turns to go.*) Where are you off to, Mavlon-aka? Your advice would be useful.

MAVLON: I've got other things to attend to.

ADILOV: Going to bed?

MAVLON: I've got to go to the seed store.

ADILOV: Very well, but drop in again on your way back. We didn't finish our conversation.

Mavlon goes off.

RAKHIMDJAN (*annoyed*): What's he want at the seed store? You didn't agree with me at the management board meeting. I told you Mavlon ought to be removed from his job as team-leader! But he won't keep it long anyway!

ADILOV: Don't be hasty, dear Rakhimdjan! We, too, are partly to blame.

RAKHIMDJAN (*indignantly*): Did I do anything to make him like this?

ADILOV: Possibly. You shielded him from criticism. . . .

RAKHIMDJAN: Mavlon always ploughed up more land than anyone else! He got the biggest harvests.

Sultanat appears at the window. Dekhkanbai comes out on to the verandah.

RAKHIMDJAN: Well, we won't spoil the holiday. Who's going to carry the banner?

DEKHKANBAI: The banner?

ADILOV (*with a glance at Dekhkanbai*): Let our young people give their opinion.

DEKHKANBAI: I don't know, perhaps you'll be surprised at my suggestion, but I think it should be—Mavlon!

RAKHIMDJAN (*astonished*): Mavlon? I would have said so before, but now. . . .

ADILOV: Just a minute, dear Rakhimdjan. Is the kolkhoz getting the banner for cotton?

DEKHKANBAI: That's right.

ADILOV: Did Mavlon give us the biggest harvest?

RAKHIMDJAN: Well, I suppose he did.

ADILOV: Then I agree with Dekhkanbai.

RAKHIMDJAN (*sarcastically*): And you talk about me shielding Mavlon from criticism.

ADILOV: And Mavlon must make the answering speech too!

RAKHIMDJAN (*indignantly*): Well, I won't say anything. And you can take my silence as a sign of disagreement.

DEKHKANBAI: But I will say this. Mavlon thinks we want to spoil his fine reputation, the reputation he deserves. But now he will see that although we criticize him we are ready to give him his due.

ADILOV: Well, what do you say to that, Rakhimdjan-aka?

RAKHIMDJAN: I've been friends with Mavlon for many years. I hope you are right. Anyway it's two against one. Proposal accepted! Saltanat, go and tell Mavlon to get ready.

SALTANAT (*bends down a finger*): Go to Mavlon—one! (*Turns to go.*)

RAKHIMDJAN: Just a minute, Saltanat! A secretary must stay in the office until the chairman has changed his clothes. Our guests might arrive at any moment. . . .

SALTANAT: Everybody's changing, but I'm all stained with paint.

RAKHIMDJAN: Even your nose.

SALTANAT: Oh! (*Rubs off the paint.*)

ADILOV: Saltanat, when Mavlon comes, tell him to wait for me.

SALTANAT: Very good, Adilov-aka.

Dekhkanbai, Adilov and Rakhimdjan go off. A flourish from the band. Kuziyev runs in.

KUZIYEV: Saltanat, my joy! Do me a favour. When the delegation appears, wave your handkerchief. I can't see the road from where I am.

SALTANAT: And I can't see it from where I am either.

KUZIYEV: No, you can't. What shall we do? (*He notices the ladder.*) Saltanat! Climb up on the roof!

SALTANAT: The idea! A secretary climbing on the roof!

KUZIYEV: But you won't be doing it just for me, Saltanat—it's for the kolkhoz! (*She climbs the ladder on to the roof*) Well? Can you see all right?

SALTANAT (*from the roof*): Everything!

KUZIYEV: Can you see me too?

SALTANAT: Yes, even you.

KUZIYEV (*to the band*): Get ready! (*Runs out.*)

Enter Mavlon. He hears Saltanat singing but cannot see her. He looks round, peeps into the office window, and finally notices Saltanat on the roof.

MAVLON: Look here, Saltanat, have you ever seen a muezzin standing in his minaret?

SALTANAT: No, never. I've told you before. . . .

MAVLON: Well, you've climbed even higher.

SALTANAT: I'm afraid of missing the delegation.

MAVLON (*frowning*): The delegation. . . . (*A short pause.*) Where's the Party organizer?

SALTANAT: Adilov will soon be here. And the chairman asked me to warn you that at seven there will be a meeting.

MAVLON: I've told you once already, I'm not coming to any meeting.

SALTANAT: You won't be at the meeting? But you've got to take the banner!

MAVLON: The banner? Me? You must have got something wrong, Saltanat.

SALTANAT: No, I haven't. And you've got to make a speech in answer.

MAVLON: A speech in answer? Who said that—the chairman?

SALTANAT: No, the chairman was against it. But Dekhkanbai insisted. (*Reproachfully*) Dekhkanbai does everything for you. He helped to get your harvest in and he defended you before the management board. Do you know what he said? He said he had come here to learn from you. He said you were the best team-leader and would stay the best. And Adilov supported Dekhkanbai.

Mavlon is flabbergasted.

KUZIYEV (*off stage*): Saltanat, can you see anybody yet?

SALTANAT: No, not yet.

KUZIYEV (*off stage*): Keep a good look-out.

MAVLON (*to himself*): Dekhkanbai insisted? . . . I don't understand. . . . I can't understand it. . . . (*He turns to go.*)

SALTANAT: Mavlon-aka, where are you going? The Party organizer asked you to wait for him.

MAVLON: I'll be back soon. Never fear, I'll be back! Dekhkanbai said that! . . . I'll be back in a minute, Saltanat! (*Rushes off.*)

SALTANAT: What's the matter with him? Must be ill.

Sound of a car hooting. ♪

Someone's coming! It's the delegation! (*To the band.*) Khashim! (*Waves her handkerchief*) It's the delegation! Play!

The band blares out. Enter Khamrobibi with a bundle, Kholniso and Aman with a suitcase. Their first remarks are drowned by the band.

KHAMROBIBI (*continuing an argument*): It was you who persuaded me to let my daughter go to the Hungry Steppe. It was your son who brought such shame on me. . . .

KHOLNISO: We have yet to see who should be ashamed.

Band stops playing.

My son wrote to me that they were all doing well. Isn't that what your daughter wrote too?

Saltanat stares at the old women in surprise.

KHAMROBIBI: A witch-doctor must have dictated that letter, for it was sweeter than honey. My brother's letter opened my eyes.

KHOLNISO: The good man's words are honey, the evil man's are vinegar.

KHAMROBIBI: My dear Kholniso, I hope you won't have to pickle your tongue in vinegar one of these days.

AMAN (*he has already had a peep into the office*): Mother! Auntie! This is the right place. It's the chairman's office.

SALTANAT (*from the roof*): Salaam, dear guests!

The old women and Aman stare around.

KHAMROBIBI (*seeing Saltanat*): Salaam!

KHOLNISO and AMAN (*together*): Salaam!

KHAMROBIBI (*to Saltanat*): The younger son of my neighbour here says that this is the chairman's office. If he is right, where is his secretary whom I could ask whether I can see him.

SALTANAT: I am his secretary.

KHAMROBIBI (*to Kholniso*): That's the secretary! How high does the chairman sit if the secretary sits on the roof!

SALTANAT: You're the first to arrive. (*Climbs down and hands them flowers*): Go into the office and have a rest and I'll run and fetch the chairman. Where is your delegation from? What kolkhoz?

KHOLNISO: What delegation?

AMAN: Comrade Secretary, we. . . .

KHOLNISO: Aman, just a minute. (*To Khamrobibi*) Tell her, dear friend, tell her what we've come about.

KHAMROBIBI: Do you think I won't? (*To Saltanat*) Of course, I am an old woman, my words may not be listened to, but I will permit myself to remark that delegations do not come to visit scorpions! (*Returns the flowers*) Aman, there is the telephone. Call that scorpion here for me.

AMAN (*offended*): No one calls up scorpions on the telephone either.

Saltanat is bewildered.

KHOLNISO: My friend. . . .

KHAMROBIBI: I am no friend of yours.

KHOLNISO: We've been friends for forty years and now suddenly you say you're not my friend. First of all call up your daughter and question her, then you can call up my son.

KHAMROBIBI: No, I'll call up your son first and tell him all I've found out about him. And I won't even speak to my daughter. I shall take her by the hand—and off I shall go! Listen, secretary, ring up the station and order me two tickets for tomorrow. One for me and one for Khafiza!

SALTANAT: Excuse me, but what relation are you of Khafiza's?

KHAMROBIBI: That's a strange question. Frogs have no tails, and girls have no brains. What relation do you think I am if she's my daughter and I'm her mother?

SALTANAT: Her mother? So that's who you are! And you are Auntie Kholniso? And this is Aman? I thought you were younger.

AMAN (*embarrassed*): I'm sorry. . . . Dekhkanbai is my elder brother. I hope he is well.

SALTANAT: He's very well. He and Khafiza are in the village. I'll go and fetch them.

As she runs off she bumps into Kuziyev.

KUZIYEV (*running in*): Welcome to the delegation! Band, play!

Band plays a flourish. Saltanat tries in vain to stop Kuziyev.

(*Introducing himself*) Khashim Kuziyev, leader of the building team!

SALTANAT: Khashim! This isn't a delegation!

KUZIYEV (*in surprise*): What is it then?

SALTANAT: Come with me. I'll explain everything. (*Leads off the astonished Kuziyev.*)

KHAMROBIBI: If you hadn't persuaded me to send my daughter off to the Hungry Steppe, my grey hair would never have known such shame. Your son has disgraced me, he has disgraced my brother, and Khafiza. . . . And now there's this band playing!

KHOLNISO: We don't know yet who's disgraced who. My son wrote to me that everything was all right with them. Wasn't that what your daughter wrote too?

KHAMROBIBI (*shouting*): A witch-doctor dictated it to her. That's why it was as sweet as honey.

KHOLNISO: A witch-doctor? My son, a witch-doctor?

AMAN: Mother! Auntie! (*Points to the notice*) Can't you see what it says: SILENCE PLEASE!

The old women continue their quarrel in a whisper. It is like a pantomime. Dekhkanbai runs in.

DEKHKANBAI: Aman, dear, how are you! (*Noticing the two old women quarrelling*) What's this—another peaceful little chat?

The old women are arguing so heatedly that they fail to notice him. He goes up to Kholniso. She has her back to him and, thinking it is Aman, shakes him off.

KHOLNISO: Go away, Aman. . . . Don't interrupt our chat. . . . Go away, I tell you. . . . (*She turns round and throws out her arms.*) My son! (*Embraces Dekhkanbai and begins to cry.*)

DEKHKANBAI: Dear mothers! Greetings! What wind brings you here?

AMAN: It wasn't the wind. We came in an aeroplane!

KHOLNISO: I would have come by train, but my neighbour insisted on coming by plane.

KHAMROBIBI: Backward, am I?! I got into that plane before you.

DEKHKANBAI: It's a very good thing you've come. This is a red-letter day for us. (*Goes up to Khamrobibi.*) How are you, Auntie Khamrobibi?

KHAMROBIBI (*icily*): When a snake hisses, the tongue cannot speak. Here is a letter (*hands it to him.*) Please, read it.

AMAN (*to Dekhkanbai*): Auntie got that letter from Mavlon.

DEKHKANBAI: From Mavlon?

AMAN: It's about you.

KHAMROBIBI (*while Dekhkanbai is reading*): A red-letter day for the kolhoz, you say? My red-letter day will come when I and Khafiza get into the train that will take us away from the sorcerer who has bewitched my daughter. Was this what I expected of you? Was it for this I wanted you to marry my daughter?

DEKHKANBAI: Did you believe this too, mother? Did you come here with auntie to fetch Khafiza?

KHOLNISO: How can you say such a thing, my son? I am a propagandist! Ever since we received that letter—would that it had turned to ashes before it was written!—I have been trying to persuade Khamrobibi not to believe what Mavlon writes,

Khafiza runs in.

KHAFIZA: Aman, dear! Auntie Kholniso! Mother! (*Attempts to embrace Khamrobibi.*)

KHAMROBIBI: Keep away, you shameless creature! Come with me!

KHAFIZA (*bewildered*): What's the matter?

DEKHKANBAI (*hands Khafiza the letter*): Read that. . . .

KHAMROBIBI: Come with me! We shall go straight to the station!

AMAN: But, auntie, there won't be a train till tomorrow.

KHAMROBIBI: We'll spend the night in the steppe. Better to spend a night with the snakes than a minute with the evil spirit! What are you standing there for, Khafiza? Come!

DEKHKANBAI: You are forgetting, auntie, that Khafiza is not only my fiancée but a group-leader.

AMAN: A group-leader in the Hungry Steppe!

KHAMROBIBI: I won't interfere in the affairs of the kolkhoz. Who ever heard of me interfering in other people's affairs? But if Khafiza says one single word, I will turn your whole office upside down. Why are you silent, Khafiza?

KHAFIZA: I'm not going anywhere, mother.

KHAMROBIBI: She wouldn't obey her uncle, now she won't obey her mother. (*Bursting into a wail*) The evil spirits have bewitched my daughter!

KHOLNISO (*sarcastically*): Bewitched her daughter!

KHAMROBIBI: They have! An evil spirit did it. Dekhkanbai did it!

KHOLNISO (*belligerently*): Dekhkanbai an evil spirit?!

AMAN: Mother! Auntie! (*Points to the notice*) Can't you see what's written there: SILENCE PLEASE!

The old women continue their quarrel in a whisper. Enter Adilov.

ADILOV: Welcome to you, dear guests! A thousand greetings! Salaam!

AMAN (*embarrassed*): Salaam! We came here by plane.

ADILOV (*surprised*): But whose mother is whose?

KHAMROBIBI (*pointing at Kholniso*): She gave birth to a scorpion!

KHOLNISO: What? I gave birth to a scorpion?! Why, I'll. . .

Aman points warily at the notice. Kholniso subsides.

ADILOV (*to Dekhkanbai*): What has happened?

KHAFIZA: Read this, Adilov-aka. (*Hands him the letter.*)

Enter Rakhimdjan, Kuzyev, and Saltanat.

RAKHIMDJAN: Salaam! The mothers have come? It's a joy to my heart. (*Breaks off*) But I see no joy. . .

ADILOV: Mavlon wrote them a letter.

RAKHIMDJAN: What letter?

ADILON (*reads*): "Dekhkanbai has turned out to be a very crafty schemer. He wants to become team-leader instead of me. . . He tries to humiliate me everywhere. . . He called me a rusty nail. . . He has set the whole kolkhoz against me. He has forced Khafiza to leave my house before her marriage. Come at once and take your daughter away."

RAKHIMDJAN: Oh dear, oh dear! Well, Adilov-aka, who was right? Well, Dekhkanbai, who was right?

KHAMROBIBI: My brother is right! My brother wrote me the truth!

ADILOV: There is not a word of truth in the whole letter.

KHAMROBIBI: There you are! That's just what my brother writes. Dekhkanbai has set everyone against him.

Enter Mavlon. At the sight of the ~~fold~~ old women he stops short.

My brother would never write a lie to his sister, he would never write lies about his niece.

MAVLON: Yes, he would! (*Steps forward*) I wrote lies.

KHAMROBIBI: Lies? May the tongue that tells lies wither away!

MAVLON: I thought badly of Dekhkanbai. I was the first man to till the earth here. I thought Dekhkanbai wanted to humiliate me, wanted to be at the top instead of me. . . . I thought if Khafiza goes, Dekhkanbai will go too. And that's why I wrote to my sister. But today I have realized that Dekhkanbai did not offend me. I offended him. "Offended" isn't the right word. I insulted him! And so I wrote another letter to my sister. I have only just written it. I wanted to post it but I didn't have time. Here, Dekhkanbai, read it. (*Hands him the letter.*)

DEKHKANBAI: There's no need, uncle. I believe it is a good letter.

KHAMROBIBI: So my brother has deceived me! Never mind, I'll make him hop for it, like a frog in a hot frying pan.

MAVLON: Just a minute, sister. (*To Dekhkanbai*) Don't you want to read it? I understand. . . . You read it, Khafiza.

KHAFIZA: I won't read your letters, uncle.

MAVLON (*bitterly*): No one wants to read Mavlon's letter.

RAKHIMDJAN (*gently*): But why should we? We hear your voice. We believe you.

MAVLON: The people have a saying: "The man who knows the road never stumbles." I thought I knew the road. . . . I thought I was going ahead. . . . But I stumbled and went off the road. My foot stumbled and I thought Dekhkanbai had pushed me. But he wasn't pushing me, instead he put me back on the right road. . . . What I've come to say is this, Rakhimdjana-aka. I am not entitled to take the banner! I am not entitled to make the speech!

ADILOV: I won't undertake to decide this alone. Let everybody have his say. Let Dekhkanbai speak, Khafiza. . . .

KHAFIZA: It hurts me to speak of my uncle. . . . He is a wonderful cotton-grower. He has tilled ever so much land in the Hungry Steppe. He has regenerated the soil and cleansed it of salt. But as a man? That old salt has eaten into his bones. He set himself above the collective, he took offence and started hindering our work. And . . . I can't say any more. . . . (*Turns away.*)

DEKHKANBAI: Khafiza is taking it too hard. But when we see a cotton plant drooping in the field we go and tend it. . . .

KHAMROBIBI (*wrathfully*): If a cotton bush is infected with a disease, it ought to be pulled out!

DEKHKANBAI: A good cotton-grower doesn't pull out his plants, he cures them.

KUZIYEV: That's right, Dekhkanbai! If a nail gets bent we straighten it out.

RAKHIMDJAN (*in alarm*): Careful with that nail. . . . Why bring all that up again?

ADILOV: But I think it should be brought up. I want to remind you, Mavlon-aka, that when you were going ahead, the rest of the kolkhoz fell into step with you. The country is marching towards communism and the people follow

those who are in the van. But, my dear Mavlon, to be able to go faster one must cleanse one's heart and mind of the old crust of prejudice, the old ways of thinking. That is why the Party calls upon us to remember criticism and self-criticism. Raisins taste better than the bitter quinine you had to swallow in the clinic. But it's the quinine that cures people. That's what I think we should remember. . . . And there's another thing I want to remind you of: at seven o'clock there will be a meeting and you have got to make a speech.

MAVLON: I'm not entitled to it. I ought to do something to deserve such an honour.

RAKHIMDJAN: You'll be cultivating the new lands soon, Mavlon-aka, you'll be leading your team. . . .

MAVLON: I won't be leading them alone . . . we'll till the soil together. Listen to me, friends! Come with me and I'll show you something. Dekhkanbai will let me have some young people for the job. I've got my eye on a stretch of land. (*He points*) There it is, over there, beyond the rice field. We'll plough up another four hectares above the plan. The Comsomols will do it!

ADILOV: I support the honoured Mavlon's proposal. We'll consider that up till now Mavlon-aka has been ill in hospital. He has taken some bitter medicine and today he is well again.

KUZIYEV: Band! Play!

Band plays a flourish.

KHOLNISO (*to Mavlon*): I didn't believe your letter right from the start. (*To Khamrobibi*) Now you don't believe it either, but you come to realize these things later, always later.

KHAMROBIBI: All right, friend, if I was in the wrong, forgive me, and if you are in the wrong—although you never are, of course—I'll forgive you too.

RAKHIMDJAN: What a wonderful day! We'll get the banner! Mavlon is well again. The honoured aunties have arrived. I haven't eaten pilau for six months, but today I could eat three bowlfuls. (*Unexpectedly*) I've got a plan!

ADILOV: And I've got a plan too.

MAVLON: And so have I! A good plan. My sister Khamrobibi and the honoured Kholniso will stay with us.

ADILOV: And in the meantime Khashim will build a house.

KUZIYEV: Certainly!

RAKHIMDJAN: And we shall eat pilau at the wedding of Khafiza and Dekhkanbai.

ADILOV: And of Saltanat and Kuziyev.

KHAMROBIBI: Of course, I am an old woman, no one need listen to my opinion or take any notice of what I think, but even if you don't ask me, I shall say it all the same: I agree!

An alarm-clock rings in Khamrobibi's bundle.

KHAFIZA: Is that your alarm-clock? Did you bring it with you? (*Pulls the clock out of the bundle.*)

KHAMROBIBI: To forget one's alarm-clock is as bad as forgetting Allah. Khafiza, dear, have you made your wedding present yet?

KHAFIZA: The suzanei? No, mother, I'm still making it. And not alone either. . . . We're all doing it, the whole kolkhoz! Look: every stretch of new land that we till is part of the pattern for our suzanei. Just imagine what the Hungry Steppe will be like in three or four years.

Music. Darkness falls but the steppe grows brighter and brighter as the music swells.

Curtain

EPILOGUE

The same office building. The flowers and trees all round are in full bloom. New houses surrounded by young orchards stretch away down both sides of the street. Round the office building there is a flower-bed. Khamrobibi and Kholniso seated in front of it are singing while they embroider a suzanei which till the end of the scene remains hidden from the audience by bushes and flowers.

KHOLNISO: Do you remember how we didn't want to let our children go off to the Hungry Steppe? My elder son, your daughter's husband—he was only her fiancé in those days—how he had to persuade you! But now. . . .

KHAMROBIBI (*with emotion*): May the life of the people who made this land anew be full of happiness and joy!

KHOLNISO: May it be so! My elder son has a broad road ahead of him, and my younger son has a broad road ahead of him too. He's been accepted for the institute.

KHAMROBIBI: Yes, he will soon be studying to become a conductor.

KHOLNISO: Not a conductor—a constructor!

KHAMROBIBI: It's just as good.

Aman runs in excitedly: he has grown.

AMAN: Mother! Auntie! They're going away. . . .

KHOLNISO (*in alarm*): What did you say? Where?

KHAMROBIBI: Going away again? It's all your son's doing. What's wrong with the Hungry Steppe? Why should they want to leave it?

AMAN: Auntie! It's Saltanat and Khashim who're going away. Here they come now!

Enter Kuziyev, Saltanat, Dekhkanbai, and Khafiza.

KUZIYEV: Yes, auntie, Saltanat and I are going away. . . . (*Sings*):

Our land opens every road to the young,
Our land pays all honour to the old. . . .

Enter Adilov and Mavlon.

MAVLON (*good-naturedly*): Who's old? When you're half my age you can call me an old man. . . .

KHAMROBIBI (*to Saltanat*): Where are you going away to?

DEKHKANBAI: We envy them, Khafiza and I

KHOLNISO: I've guessed it! (*To Khamrobibi*) You will guess it too, but after me, as usual. You know where they are going. . . .

AMAN (*grandly*): To build the Main Turkmenian Canal. I could have gone too if it hadn't been for the institute.

ADILOV: Never mind, Aman. There will be ships going along the canal, and your aeroplanes will be flying over it.

KHAMROBIBI: Listen to them—ships, aeroplanes!

KHOLNISO: Where? In the desert . . . in the Kara Kum Desert!

KHAMROBIBI: Allah couldn't have done that. But people can. . . .

ADILOV: Soviet people, the builders of communism, the fighters for peace.

Enter Rakhimdjan.

KHOLNISO: May all those who want war burn over a slow fire.

KHAMROBIBI: Why should it be slow? The quicker they burn, the better it will be for everybody.

RAKHIMDJAN: I don't object. (*He goes up to the old women and admires the suzanei*) Nearly finished your present? Before schedule too—it's a joy to my heart. . . .

Khafiza, Dekhkanbai, Saltanat and Kuziyev hang up the suzanei over the flower-bed. The beautiful silk-embroidered cloth glistens with all the colours of Uzbekistan.

RAKHIMDJAN: May our suzanei tell the story of our land.

KHAFIZA: The story of how the rough patches are disappearing from the silk suzanei of the Uzbek land.

ADILOV: Of regenerated people on regenerated land. . . .

KHOLNISO: Of our children. . . .

DEKHKANBAI: Of our mothers. . . .

AMAN: Of our dreams. . . .

KHAMROBIBI: May everyone read in these patterns, like writing on a paper, our words of gratitude. . . .

SALTANAT: Words of love. . . .

KUZIYEV: Words of loyalty. . . .

ADILOV: The vow of those who are building communism.

The music slowly dies away.

Curtain

Translated by Robert Daglish

MOTHER

A mother's love shines brighter than the sun;
Even at night she sends us her caress.
A mother's heart has powers excelled by none;
The strongest seek her solace in distress.

If I but call to you, you, like the sun,
Attain new height, and darkness must depart.
Come to me, mother, come, embrace your son,
And share with me the bounty of your heart.

Your name bursts from my lips when in despair;
You are the first to whom my joys I tell.
You smile at me—I know that you are there,
My sorrows disappear, and all is well.

Though long ago my childhood years were sped,
I press against your bosom like a child
And long for your soft hand to stroke my head
And yearn to hear your words, tranquil and mild.

I wish the years could spare you, mother dear;
But time speeds on—your hair has long turned grey,
Embrace me then, my mother, draw me near,
I listen eagerly to all you have to say.

Speak, mother, speak! At peace your heart may be
For I will keep forever your bequest.
Most sacred shall your will remain to me
Until my heart stops beating in my breast.

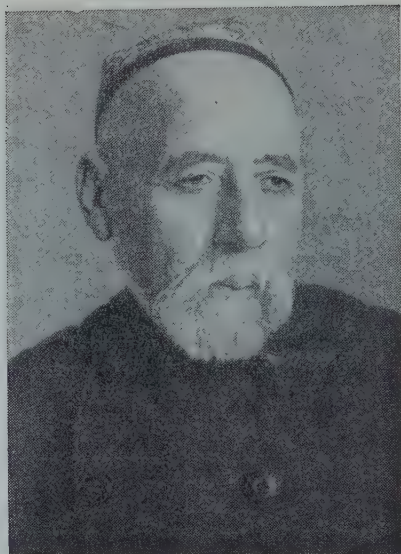
Mother and homeland—diff'rent words are they
And yet their inmost meaning is the same.
No matter where I roam or where I stay
I have their love and give the love they claim.

A mother's love shines brighter than the sun;
Even at night she sends us her caress.
A mother's heart has powers excelled by none;
The strongest seek her solace in distress.

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg

SADRIDDIN AINI

BUKHARA



adriiddin Aini (1878-1954) was the founder of the new Tadjik literature. Combining his great literary work with public activities and scientific research, Aini was simultaneously President of the Tadjik Academy of Sciences, an Honorary Member of the Uzbek Academy of Sciences and a deputy to the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R.

Aini was born in 1878 in the village of Sektara, near the town of Gijduvan. His first poems appeared in 1894-1895. But the most fruitful period in his writing came after the October Revolution. Aini himself wrote that "after October I was born again." He was greatly influenced by Russian literature, particularly the work of Gorky.

In 1924 Aini published his short novel *Odina*, a tale of the adventures of a poor Tadjik peasant. In 1927-1929 he wrote the first Tadjik novel *Dokhunda*, in which he becomes, as in his subsequent works, a chronicler of the everyday life of the Tadjik people.

Possessing a wide knowledge of the history of Central Asia, Aini produced, in 1934, the novel *Slaves*, a broad historical picture of the life of the Tadjik people in the course of a century.

One of Aini's best works is the story *The Death of the Money-Lender*. The character of the old Tadjik money-lender is drawn with a skill and psychological insight that might be compared with Balzac's immortal *Gobsek*.

Aini is the founder not only of Tadjik literature but of the Tadjik literary language too. Great credit is due to him for his *Anthology of Tadjik Literature*, and a number of works on the history, language and literature of Tadjikistan.

In the last years of his life Aini worked on his memoirs, two volumes of which were published in Russian under the title of *Bukhara* during his lifetime, while the last two volumes, an excerpt of which we are giving below, appeared in 1957 and 1958. In this work he describes his life first in the remote little village of Soktara on the bank of the Zorevshan, and then in Bukhara, where he spent his youth as a pupil of the then famous madrasah Mir-Arab. The autobiographical element does not dominate the narrative which, taken as a whole, is a broad account of the life of the Tadjiks in the days of the Bukhara emirate.

THE GRANDSON OF FAIZI AVLIE

In Bukhara there lived a man called Mullo Amon. He came to the city from the village of Rozmoz during his childhood in order to study, and settled down there. He was forty-five years old when I met him. He had neither wife nor children, no home to call his own, and lived in someone else's cell in the Turzundjan madrasah.

He was a tall corpulent swarthy man; his hair, brows, and eyes were black; at first sight he seemed to be in good health but from some of his gestures, words, and acts one felt that his mind was unbalanced. People referred to him as "touched."

It seemed to me that his "lack of mental balance" was assumed. He left on me an impression of being a man of sound common sense, one who had grown wise with experience and who had acquired a subtle understanding of human nature. Some of his views coincided with those I had heard Yakhia-hodja and Zufunun express: like them he criticized the ruling powers in Bukhara at that time. But whereas Yakhia-hodja, whenever or wherever he saw eminent people, set about exposing them, both in and out of their presence, and branding their base behaviour, Mullo Amon kept silent in similar circumstances and when there was talk about the evil deeds and injustice of our times, would say:

"Swearing and abusing does not help anyone. That changes nothing. Evil has to be destroyed."

In this trait he differed from Abdul Madjid Zufunun too. Zufunun hated the powerful of this world but took care to conceal his feelings.

At the madrasah Mullo Amon mainly studied logic and the natural sciences. Of theology—the Koran, the Mohammedan tradition and law—he said:

"That is no science. Anyone can read it in a book. It is only when you give your mind some work to do, when your thoughts go into motion, that you can speak of science. In theology you are surrounded on all sides by high



impenetrable walls. If you try to break out of those walls every bigot will call you an unbeliever."

One day in his enthusiasm for logic and the natural sciences Mullo Amon said:

"In my childhood, when I lived in the village, I heard many legends and tales about Abu-Ali ibn-Sina¹. In Babkent, in a cell near the tomb of Mir Hurdu Mir Kalon, I sat at the feet of the local mullah. And even then I decided that if I were to go to Bukhara I would certainly take the path of Abu-Ali ibn-Sina. At that time I thought there would be followers of his to be found in Bukhara."

He was silent for a while.

"My father did not wish to part with me, and he did not let me go to Bukhara. After his death, I went there and set about looking for the followers of ibn-Sina. Mullo Hamid Arab was pointed out to me as the only lover of natural sciences and philosophy who could be called a disciple of ibn-Sina. I became his pupil. He knew a little logic but was totally ignorant of philosophy and the natural sciences which interested me more than anything else. Gradually I discovered that my tutor was trying to pass himself off as a learned philosopher. That in fact was the sum total of his learning. He neglected theology and religious ritual only to acquire the reputation of a philosopher among the students at the madrasah.

"In that world," continued Mullo Amon, "most people were seeking fame. Gamblers, lovers of quail and cock-fighting, even they sought fame in their own circles. Students of theology who had no mastery of their science called themselves learned theologians; this title was not very difficult to get when everyone around was quite illiterate. My tutor, although he had never even sniffed at philosophy or the natural sciences, became famous as a scientist and philosopher. He found the simplest way to achieve fame. There were so many theologians as it was that you could not throw a stone at a dog without hitting one of them. But there was not another philosopher in the whole of Bukhara except my teacher. In despair of meeting a follower of ibn-Sina or people who had a deep knowledge of medicine and philosophy, I decided to read those subjects for myself. Unfortunately I could not find either the books of ibn-Sina, or even those books

¹ Abu-Ali ibn-Sina—Avicenna.

in which his maxims were set down. I had to make do with books whose authors used separate passages of the Chief of the Sheiks, as they called Abu-Ali ibn-Sina, or extracts from his works. They are the same books whose early pages are read in the madrasah at Bukhara. I did not stop at the first pages, I read on. But I did not turn out to be either a theologian, or a doctor, or a philosopher: I simply became a good-for-nothing; you might call me a wanderer who has a refuge neither in this world nor in the next."

"But Ahmad Kalla is a great scholar. Surely you must have met him?" I asked.

"I used to meet him and still do from time to time. Yes, he is a very great scholar, a man of our times. But I have only a smattering of knowledge, I am a man who has not found himself in life, while he is a scholar who has lost himself. From childhood he studied much and mastered science. Then he went to the emir's court and saw what rottenness and abominations were going on there. He went to Russia with one of the emir's embassies and on his return wanted to bring some order into the emir's domain too. But that was a hopeless idea. It would be easier to clear the manure from a cowshed or a stable than from those domains, for cows and donkeys obey man while that herd of cows and donkeys which considers itself to be made up of great scientists and of those who possess the powers of life or death over people will never allow a cleaning to take place there.

"Ahmad Kalla could do nothing for the people while he was in court service. He regretted this, left the court, and kept to his home. But his was not the seclusion of those who cut themselves off from the world and hide in a corner, trying to keep out of everyone's sight. His house was always full of friends. He was always brimming over with life and high spirits, conversing happily with his visitors, laughing and joking. But if you looked at him carefully you could see that his mind, like the tulip flower, was covered with marks of sorrow and that his heart was pricked with thorns. That was clear to all who heard him speak or who read his memoirs."

"What are they? Have you read them?" I asked.

"He devotes most of his time to writing them. They consist of complaints against his times, against the emir and the nobles. He reads them to those he considers worthy and capable of understanding them. To people he can trust he sometimes gives pages in manuscript. Occasionally I get an odd sheet or two."

Mullo Amon paused for reflection. Then he went on:

"But those memoirs are of no use. Now, if we had a printing press, as other countries do, Ahmad Kalla's memoirs could be made available to readers. Then many eyes would be opened and people would unite to destroy those wolves and cannibals. But what difference can it make that some ten or fifteen of Ahmad Kalla's closest friends read him, after which his pages will only gather dust or be devoured by mice? But I firmly believe the world is changing. The day is coming when we shall have order in our country too. We too shall have our printing press; perhaps some of Ahmad Kalla's memoirs will survive, after all, and will find their way into the libraries where people will read them. But by that

time the only value of those memoirs will be to show people who read them how dark and melancholy were the times in which those learned, wise, and talented people lived."

Before, I knew Mullo Amon only slightly. I made his acquaintance by chance, meeting him in the flower-garden outside the Mazar gates. After that first meeting I often talked to him, usually in that garden. On fine days he used to go for walks outside the town towards evening, stroll in the flower-garden drink tea and, with his lungs full of fresh air, return home. Whenever I felt like a chat with him I went to the garden.

Gradually we grew to know each other better. Sometimes at his suggestion we walked farther from the city, strolling across the fields and back, talking all the time.

I wanted to take him to the small madrasah on Labi Hauzi Arbob. I described all its inmates in the most glowing colours and our conversations there as particularly interesting.

He grew accustomed to going there but at first would sit silent in a corner taking no part in the conversation and finally leaving with a bored air as silently as he had arrived. All the same, once a week and sometimes more frequently he began turning up there.

One day, when people had grown accustomed to his presence, one of the inmates of the small madrasah asked him:

"You come to us, and for that we are very grateful. But you do not take part in our conversations, and that worries us. Why is it? Is it because you are older than us and consider it below your dignity to talk with us, or because you find our talk displeasing and dull?"

"If I felt embarrassed by the difference in our ages I would not have come here. But although sometimes I find your conversation boring I come to you because you are the best of the young people in Bukhara today and I have grown to love you."

This reply surprised everybody. Someone objected:

"How can it be that you like us but find our conversation boring?"

"I like you because you are better than other youths in Bukhara. I love the people of my own country, especially the best of them. As for your conversation I am willing to prove the futility of it to you, if you like."

Voices arose on all sides:

"We are listening, we are listening. Please speak."

Mullo Amon began:

"You are all fond of music. That is good. Your friends the musicians play the *tamboura* very well—Abdurrahman-hadja and Rahmat-hodja have a very clear and ringing tone. But I do not like the *tamboura*. I do not like it because the sound, especially when the strings are plucked by the fingers of a skilful musician, touch the listener, arouse feelings of melancholy, and even bring forth tears. I do not like to weep. Perhaps it is because I grew up to the sounds of the *bubna*. In our village of Rozmoz and in the surrounding districts of Babkent and Gijduvan there are splendid *bubna* players who know how to cast a spell

on the listener, to make him feel light at heart and forget all his cares and sorrows. Haffiz was right when he said: 'I heard that if a man falls into a sudden sadness the sounds of the *bubna* will soothe his sorrow.'

Mullo Amon paused for a while and then went on:

"Recently life has become difficult and I feel sad. I should like to go on to the street, exclaiming like Rustam to the wild, bold sounds of the *bubna*, go up to the gates of the emir's palace and roar like a lion: 'Listen, you wolves and cannibals! There is no hope of your ever becoming human. You have to be destroyed.'

"Another thing: you play with rhymes, sayings, and proverbs; that is all interesting and even useful, it enriches and purifies the language. But at the present time, in our conditions, it is a sheer waste of time, a pastime for people who like to amuse themselves, like training marrows to grow in fancy shapes."

Mullo Amon looked hard at each of us in turn and added:

"Now, judge for yourselves. We have no lessons in our native language either in the schools or in the madrasahs. There is not a single printing-press or newspaper in our land. What is the use of five or six or even a dozen people knowing the language well? If they taught our language in the schools and madrasahs you could pass on to your pupils all the riches of your native tongue which you have mastered here; you could print in the newspaper the conclusions of your daily conversations. Then I would say that your gatherings were useful to the people. But now? Now it is just a waste of time."

Mullo Amon gave us each another of his piercing looks and resumed:

"Very important too are your talks about the morals of Bukhara, about your dissatisfaction with the existing state of affairs, with our times. But if you reflect you will see that none of that is of any use to you or to our people. No one listens to the lamentations or the tears of the widow beside the body of her husband, or to one who mourns friends who have been flung into prison. Your complaints cannot destroy the evil-doers any more than the tears of grieving relatives can bring a dead man to life. But if you do what Bedil wrote about in the poem one of you has just recited while you were playing with rhymes: 'With the hard-hearted be yourself hard; you need to use iron to treat molten iron.'

"If you could destroy those blood-thirsty wolves, those cannibals, then you would be doing some good. But now you lack the strength to destroy them."

Mullo Amon's words pleased everyone. Heads nodded in agreement with them. Someone exclaimed: "Remember how Hadji-mahdum dealt with the Prince of the Night"¹ and at once told the story to Mullo Amon.

But after hearing the tale, Mullo Amon smiled wryly and shook his head:

"You call what Hadji-mahdum did a feat, but it is not worth a groat. You must judge every deed according to whether it helps the people. All Hadji-mahdum did was to stop the men of the Prince of the Night from doing their evil deeds in the vicinity of Hadji-mahdum's house, but they are still going on with their mischief-making elsewhere. The Prince of the Night avoids meeting

¹ The name given to the chief of the town guards.



Hadji-mahdum but in everything else he behaves just as he did before. What did the people benefit from Hadji-mahdum's exploit? It is like saying to the wolf: 'Do not touch me and my family, but go and use your fangs as much as you like on others!'

"Even if the minister had dismissed the Prince of the Night as a result of Hadji-mahdum's complaint it wouldn't have helped the people—a worse one would have taken his place. The Bukhara rulers even do this: if the people are dissatisfied with an official he is removed from office, but a worse one is appointed in his place so that people should say 'the horse-radish is no sweeter than the radish,' so that in their fear of worse they put up with evil and learn not to complain of the Hakim and other servants of the emir. Even if Hadji-mahdum had killed the Prince of the Night it would not have helped. There was once a divan-beg called Muhammed Sharif; he came to confiscate the property of one of the inhabitants of the city. Instead of taking the key of his chest from his pocket the man pulled out a pistol and shot the divan-beg through the heart. They caught the man, bound both his legs with a rope, gave the end of the rope to a man on horseback who tied it to the pommel of his saddle and spurred the horse through the streets of the city under the eyes of all. And he went on dragging the man after him until the body was torn to shreds. The remains of the corpse were picked up and thrown into a ditch outside the city for the dogs to devour. People who saw that savage cruelty were not going to risk raising even their eyes against those blood-thirsty wolves, and the robbery went on."

Mullo Amon fell silent, and sat for a while with his face averted. Then he pulled himself together and went on:

"I am known as the grandson of Faizi Avlie. Faizi Avlie was a notorious thief from Rozmoz. He used to rob the rich, he took from officials the taxes they had levied for the emir, and then gave the money to the poor. Emir Muzaffar caught him and had him cast down from the Great Minaret in Bukhara. I was

given his name because like Faizi Avlie I am from the village of Rozmoz. He was a robber, but I am not ashamed to be known as his grandson for he had the right aims. And had he done anything for the good of the people I should be proud to bear that nickname. But that was something he could not do. He distributed money to the poor, money which had been extorted from them by the rich and the tax-collectors. And what was the result? Did the emir reduce taxes? No. He even increased taxes so as to make up for what he had been robbed of. The rich people whom Faizi Avlie robbed did not give up profiteering and usury, they went for it all the harder, turning to open robbery to get back the money that has been taken from them covertly. And anyhow the crumbs distributed by Faizi Avlie did not save anyone from need.

"That is why I consider your talks here mere 'women's tears.' I am against individual deeds of bravado. Only a general rising can destroy these wolves."

In those years I did not fully understand Mullo Amon's meaning. I grasped it only after the October Revolution. All I grasped then was that he had a firm belief in the future of the people and considered a general uprising essential. But he did not know in what conditions, how and by whom that rising was to be brought about; and he could not know that. He naively believed that the people's eyes would be opened if a newspaper were founded that would print the memoirs of Ahmad Mahdum and others, that would be sufficient to start a general uprising which would lead to the destruction of the "wolves." But that this was only a dream was something I understood only after the October Revolution.



THE MULLAHS AND THE DRIVER

In the Bukhara of the emir's days there used to be held a popular festival which lasted from 22 April to 22 May. It took place near the tomb of Bahauddin Nakshband. Twice a week, on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, the men went to the festival; on Thursdays and Fridays it was the turn of the women. This festival was known as the Feast of the Crimson Rose because it coincided with the blooming of the first roses.

People would ride there from the villages on their own horses and the city-dwellers came in carriages or in hired carts. This was the liveliest and briskest season for the cart drivers. All the way along the road from Bukhara to the Tomb of Bahauddin the owners of donkeys and carts picked up fares.

The owners of the donkeys split up into two groups. One of them kept to the Mazar carriage stand near the city gates. Here, having secured payment in advance, the owners handed over the donkeys to riders. When the riders from the town reached their destination they turned over the donkeys to another group of owners who, also getting paid in advance, gave the donkeys to new riders who took them into the city again and returned them at the Mazar stand where their original owners waited for them.

During the festival the owners of the covered carts gathered as many passengers as could be crowded into the cart and usually took the fare from them somewhere on the journey before the destination was reached. This precaution was not a vain one: a great many passengers, taking advantage of the bustle at their destination, disappeared in the crowd without settling with the driver.

In one such company five mullahs—not very famous mullahs but well enough known in Bukhara, were returning from the Tomb of Bahauddin. They walked up to the cart stand and without enquiring about the fare sat down on the front seat of a cart with an ornamented top and drawn by a sturdy horse adorned with little bells and pom-poms.

The driver wanted to settle the matter of the fare, but the mullahs said:

"We shall pay what everyone else pays."

"The fare for the front seats isn't the same as the fare for the back seats," the driver protested. "It's one and a half times more."

"But we too are not the same as the others. Don't you understand that? You ought to be able to distinguish us from the common people," said one of the mullahs. "You should know that we mullahs do not miss a single one of the day's five daily prayers, and besides that, we pray for all true believers. Nor did we come here to the tomb of the holy Bahauddin Nakshband to amuse ourselves like other people, but to worship. If you ask us to pay the same as ordinary passengers we should be offended."

Willy-nilly the driver agreed to charge the mullahs the same fare for the front seats as other passengers paid for the less comfortable seats.

He found room in the cart for five more passengers, agreeing to charge one *tenga* a seat; then he sat down to wait for more passengers. But the mullahs insisted on his leaving at once.

"My horse is strong and well-fed," the driver retorted. "I always take twelve passengers. If you want me to leave with only ten then pay me another two tengas."

"You will not keep us here for the sake of two tengas," one of the mullahs replied. "If you seat two more in the cart it will be crowded and our legs will be quite numb by the time we get to the city. Through our prayers Allah out of the inexhaustible fount of his mercy will give you four tengas instead of those two."

The driver realized that the "stubborn loafers" were not to be out-argued and deciding that the best thing to do was to get rid of his importunate passengers as soon as possible, whipped up his horse. Soon his cart passed other carts on the road to the city, it overtook the donkey-riders too and even those who rode on horseback. His passengers were not smothered in dust like others and were soon at Djughiana outside Bukhara.

Here the driver reined in his horse and, as usual, asked his passengers to pay their fare. The five men sitting in the back seats at once took out their money and paid at the rate of one tenga a head.

But the mullahs with much whispering and rummaging in their pockets drew out copper coins, counted them and, reckoning the fare at half a tenga a passenger, handed the driver two and a half tengas for all five of them.

The driver, who sat sideways in the saddle, turned towards the mullahs. Noticing that the mullah's fist was full of coins he held out his skull-cap and asked the mullah to pour the money into it.

The mullah did so, but the driver, noticing that the money was short, asked:

"How much have you paid, sir?"

"One hundred and sixty, which is the equivalent of two and a half tengas of full value from the mint of noble Bukhara," replied the mullah.

"That is for how many passengers?"

"For all five of us."

"But didn't we settle for one tenga each?"

"In the Book is written: *Al-Kaulu bilial-amali la-i'tabary*," replied the mullah.

"Those are words I don't understand, sir. Tell me in Tadjik."

"It means, roughly, that a word without an act, that is, for example, something said without the performance of a deed, is invalid," said the mullah in interpretation of the Arabic phrase.

"I don't understand. I'm not one of your pupils. Why should I listen to your words? Pay up quick. Time's passing. There's no sense in my standing here with an empty cart. Don't keep me from my work. I'm a poor man, sir."

"That's all you'll get," said another mullah. "It's not much but you must take it as full settlement. We shall pray for you and your family."

"My wife and children need bread more than your prayers. Don't keep me hanging about. I'm wasting time. Come on, pay up!"



"What is the ignoramus babbling? Does he doubt the power of prayer, the apostate?" cried another mullah and, turning to the driver, said: "Take it or leave it, it's all you'll get."

"I won't touch your money," said the driver and held out his skull-cap with the money to the mullah. "If I'd waited for your prayers to bring me money we'd have all died of hunger long ago. Let my services pay for your prayers for my late parents. Take your money and buy yourself some *halva* with it. But get out of my cart. I've no time for you."

"What is he saying, the unbeliever?" cried one of the mullahs. "He's again casting aspersion on the power of prayer. You're cursing us, are you? We are not going to get out of this cart, we'll drive with you to the supreme judge, the protector of the Sharia, we shall report your blasphemy. Drive there straight away."

On hearing the solemn exhortation, the driver who up to that point had kept his feelings under control, grew angry with the shameless mullahs, flung the coins on to the ground and cried:

"Get out of this cart or I'll throw you out as I've thrown out your coins."

Then one of the mullahs said:

"There's no doubt about it: this driver is an infidel. He ought to be bound hand and foot, beaten and brought before the supreme judge."

And, turning to the other five passengers sitting in the cart, said:

"Come, help us to take him to the supreme judge. They'll test his faith there and teach him not to blaspheme."

But the others did not want to get mixed up in this affair; slipping out of the cart, they hurried off down the nearby lanes. The driver, sticking his whip into his belt, drew himself up to his full height and shouted:

"The man's not yet born who can bind me," and stepping from the shaft into the cart tossed the mullahs one after the other on to the road. After which he whipped up his horse and drove off.

We heard an account of these events from Hadji-mahdum on the day they occurred. He learned of them by chance from one of the five men in the cart who had not wished to serve as witnesses. From him he found out that the driver was from the Faizabad cart stand. Hadji-mahdum, who loved a scandal, lost no time in going to the place, found the driver and questioned him closely about what had happened. The driver knew one of the five mullahs, a certain Djunbul-mahdum. Hadji-mahdum went straight from the market to Djunbul's cell at the Divan-beg madrasah. There he heard the same story. In fact, all three accounts coincided and confirmed the authenticity of the story. From Djunbul, Hadji-mahdum learned the names of the other mullahs. They were Abdurrahman Raftor, Keim-mahdum, Kori Same and Muhtar-hodja.

At that time Djunbul-mahdum was about thirty-five years of age. Tall, lean, slender-waisted, he reminded one of a maize stalk but his long yellowish haggard face looked more like the nuzzle of a jackal. The likeness was emphasized by his narrow slits of eyes under colourless eye-brows with no eyelashes and only a thick splotch of freckles on his nose and forehead testified to his human origin. His wisp of a beard on a sharp chin resembled a patch of ginger hair on a stray cat.

Usury was his main occupation; he lent money on interest to the traders in the flour market and also to the inhabitants of the cells in the Divan-beg madrasah where he lived.

Djunbul-mahdum was supposed to have completed his studies at the Bukhara madrasah but, all the same, he remained ill-educated. He had a very poor understanding of religious questions but behaved as though but for him Islam would perish.

Abdurrahman Raftor, a little fat man in his early forties—the sort known as "little barrel" in Bukhara—walked as though every part of his body moved of its own accord so that he looked perpetually tipsy. It was because of this that the people of Bukhara gave him the nickname of Raftor which means "gait."

Abdurrahman Raftor, a devout and rich mullah, received a large income from several cells in the Kukeltash madrasah and also from shop buildings of which he owned several. Not content with this, he went in for reselling cells, and usury.

He was listed as a teacher but instead of teaching, usually sat in the Kukeltash madrasah and held forth on theological themes or told pious parables about miracles.

His friend Keim-mahdum was a taller man. He was no less of a fanatic than Abdurrahman. Both of them took part regularly in abstruse theological debates where, without understanding anything that was going on, Keim-mahdum shouted louder than anyone else. He too owned several cells in the Kukeltash madrasah.



Not a cell was sold or rented out in this madrasah without these two friends being in the know; and they too were bound to have a say in the distribution of any money involved in the operations; the deal was not considered quite correct and legal until their approval had been secured.

Kori Same has already been described in an earlier volume of *Bukhara*. Muhtar-hodja, one of the oldest of the Bukhara teachers, also owned some cells at Kukeltash. Of medium height and girth, long-bearded, swarthy-complexioned, looking rather like an Arab with his big black eyes, Muhtar-hodja was nicknamed the "black-haired old man"; he was well over sixty but there was not a trace of grey in his beard.

Outwardly he behaved modestly and placidly and laid no claims to being an authority in theological matters. Even the arrogance and pretentiousness of his son, who considered himself of superior social origin than his father and worthier of respect as a scholar, did not draw the old man out of his smiling silence. Everyone was surprised that such a gentle urbane man should have been drawn into the quarrel with the driver.

Hadji-mahdum told us that the mullahs who had been involved in the incident with the driver were determined to take the driver into court, accuse him of apostasy, prove the charge and get the man sentenced to death.

It may sound incredible that one driver had the courage to stand up to five mullahs in those days when the mullahs held arbitrary sway over all Bukhara, forming the bulwark of the emir's power, vindicating the most dissolute acts by the emir and justifying all lawlessness and violence with quotations from the Sharia.

But Bukhara also had its guilds of grooms and drivers whose customs were considerably more freedom-loving than in the trade guilds. And the grooms and drivers of Faizabad surpassed all the other grooms and drivers of Bukhara in their boldness, wilfulness, implacability and love of freedom.

The late chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of Uzbekistan, Uldash Akhunbabayev, worked for some time before the October Revolution as driver to an Andizhan merchant who traded with Fergana and Kashgar. One day a quarrel over wages broke out between the merchant and Akhunbabayev. The merchant decided to use his influence with the tsarist police by accusing the stubborn driver of being a political suspect and getting him sent to Siberia. His prospective victim learned, however, about these plans and ran off to Bukhara where he obtained work among the Faizabad drivers.

By an agreement between the emir and the tsarist government, the emir arrested fugitives from Russia and turned them over to the Russian government's political agent. If the fugitive was accused of a political crime any subject of the Bukhara emirate who concealed him was liable to be punished severely. In spite of that, the Faizabad drivers risked punishment by hiding Akhunbabayev for several years in their midst and working with him. Akhunbabayev told me about that himself in 1936.

AWAITING THE EXECUTION

On the day after the row between the mullahs and the driver a rumour spread through the city that the clergy had prepared a decision according to which the driver was declared an apostate. This, it was alleged, was confirmed by his cursing the clergy, the Prophet, Allah, religion and the Sharia. It was said that the driver would be caught and condemned to death, most likely by stoning.

"The driver blasphemed, the mullahs will stone him," the word went around.

Next day there was a rumour that the supreme judge had flung the driver into prison and that on the basis of theological interpretation had appealed to the emir; the judge was now awaiting the supreme edict. As soon as the edict of the emir was announced the apostate would be publicly stoned.

Idlers and sensation-mongers gathered every morning on El Registan Square to see the execution. When they saw that no preparations were being made there they ran to the Donkey Bazaar, where public executions also took place. Finding nothing there, they hurried to Soldiers' Square outside the city, a military drilling ground.

The people of Bukhara frequently had opportunities to see public executions, when, by order of the emir, a man would be beaten to death by seventy-five

strokes or hacked to pieces like a sheep. But they had never seen death by stoning or even heard of this form of execution from their fathers and grandfathers. For that reason many people were greatly excited at the prospect of this unprecedented event.

No one had a clear idea how an execution of this nature would be carried out. People questioned each other eagerly and anyone who could provide any information by quoting the mullahs found himself the centre of attention. If somebody turned up who had heard about the sentence from any of the five prosecuting mullahs he, and he alone, was listened to, his were the words that were considered the most weighty and indisputable. And those five mullahs left no one's thirst for news unslaked for long and provided the most detailed descriptions of that kind of execution. Djunbul-mahdum was specially assiduous. He went from street to street, sitting down with acquaintances and strangers alike, retelling the news, explaining the resolution of the theologians, and proudly ascribing the whole affair to himself, triumphantly calling himself the inspirer of that stern sentence of the protectors of the faith. According to him, had he not been present when the driver blasphemed, his blasphemy would have gone unpunished, as unnoticed as water trickling through sand.

"In recent times," he said, "not only common people but the mullahs themselves have lost their sense of dignity. But I, with all the zeal and ardour for Islam bestowed on me by Allah, took up the cause without hesitation and drew the other four after me, and now all is being accomplished in full accordance with the Sharia."

In telling all this Djunbul-mahdum did not have a word to say about the fare for the journey, which was the origin of the quarrel between the mullahs and the driver. He said that somewhere near Djughana, as they were sitting in the cart driving back from the Tomb, the driver started a row over the fare with the other passengers and that during the quarrel he had used "profane words." The mullahs, he alleged, tried to argue with him and admonished him, but in reply he had called them names, using blasphemous words; the other passengers, he said, after the mullahs had intervened, grew scared of the infuriated driver and jumped out of the cart and ran away.

"It is a pity that we do not know who those other passengers were, and where they came from. If we knew we would have called them as witnesses. Then the driver would have been in a real fix and it would have been easier to sentence him to a more severe punishment. As it was, we had to be both plaintiffs and witnesses, and it was no easy matter to make that concord with the Sharia. But Allah required our labours for he who labours and suffers in the name of the Faith is granted divine grace for his blessed toil."

Many sensation-seeking mullahs assembled at the Kukeltash madrasah in those days. Near the entrance the higher mullahs usually gathered to gossip—those whom the poet Muhammed Siddik Hairat called "the leaders of the Kureisheet tribe." Now this place became the headquarters of the militant clergy who issued from there their absolute judgements among the faithful.



In one large niche in that building sat in state Muhtar-hodja and Kori Same, so old and decrepit that they hardly ever went out of doors. To the right of them dwelt Abdurrahman Raftor, to the left, Keim-mahdum. Although these two were in a condition to go out they, unlike Djunbul-mahdum, considered it beneath their dignity to totter through the streets. However, they considered it a worthy deed to sit in the madrasah and answer the questions of the inquisitive about the incident with the driver.

All around milled idle people and sensation-mongers eager to hear what the theologians had to say about the driver's fate.

During those days people in high places kept on confirming the account of the incident and their version of the events coincided with the one Djunbul-mahdum had spread. Unanimous in this, these people invented fresh details and explanations, each one trying to prove that he and no one else was the main inspirer of the whole affair.

About the driver they declared in unison:

"He'll be stoned to death."

According to their accounts, execution by stoning meant the following: the criminal was buried in the earth up to his waist and all Mohammedans gathering on the square cast stones at him, hitting him on the head, in the face, and on the chest and back, until the man was quite buried in stones irrespective of whether he was alive or dead.

"In any event," they added,^o "the right to cast the first stone belongs to us mullahs. We were the first to accuse the man, hence, the first bliss should be ours. But of course, others will throw their stones as well and they too will receive divine grace."

The crowds of idlers who congregated early each morning on El Registan Square, at the Donkey Bazaar and on Soldiers' Square, having heard about the procedure for carrying out the execution from people who repeated the words of the mullahs, grew greatly excited and questioned each other eagerly.

"So it means that all who want to be filled with the grace of Allah must on the day of the stoning bring stones and pour them out on to the square so that there will be enough to cast at the sinner."

Others had their doubts about this.

"Surely you cannot attain grace as easily as that? Everyone who thirsts for grace must gather stones, bring them to the place and cast them himself. Only then will he receive divine grace."

And there were yet others who said:

"I am not going to cast stones or bring any either. Who knows whether that driver is really guilty? Talk about receiving grace! Maybe they'll be murdering an innocent man, and if I cast a stone I too will be taking part in the crime. Why should I do that?"

But people replied to such objectors:

"If the mullahs bear witness that he is a dishonourable man, and if the theologians have pronounced their verdict that the man should be stoned, how can there be any question of his guilt?"

"But there are some mullahs who say that it would be unjust to kill that driver."

"Who are those mullahs? I haven't met a mullah so far who considers the execution unjust."

"There is Mullo Amon from Rozmoz. He is one of the big mullahs, he finished his studies long ago. Yesterday he spoke so at the Milk Bazaar, I heard him with my own ears."

To that it was objected:

"The words of Mullo Amon have no weight. The other mullahs call him the 'grandson of Faizi Avlie,' and Faizi Avlie was a bandit."

Someone interrupted:

"They don't string up a goat by a sheep's legs. If the mullahs are acting unjustly they'll lie in their own grave and their sins will be upon their own heads, but what have you or I got to do with the business? If the mullahs have accused the driver falsely you, like him, may suffer for it as a result. Let whoever thinks an injustice is being done refrain from casting a stone, but he would do best to keep silent. Is it not said: 'There are mice in the walls, and mice have ears'? There are informers all around us. Keep your tongue still."

So at all the places which might be used for the execution people assembled every day and talked among themselves, arguing and expressing their concern. Days passed, but the execution did not take place.

Gradually the lovers of street spectacles gathered less numerous and less frequently. You no longer heard quotations from the lips of people in the know although these people assured everybody: "If not today then tomorrow, or at the latest, the day after tomorrow the driver will be stoned to death."

The good-for-nothings of Bukhara, it is true, went on arguing as before, but now the subject of their arguments was not so much when and how the execution would be carried out but the reasons for the delay. Some said that the emir did not wish to listen to a handful of mullahs and have a man killed, who had done no harm either to the state or to his own authority. Others suggested that the mullahs had brought an unjust charge, had made all this fuss for nothing, and that the supreme judge had detected the injustice but, being afraid of the mullahs' wrath, had sent an appeal to the emir, enclosing a secret message in which he established the injustice of the mullahs' and begged the emir not to promulgate the supreme sentence and thus cause injustice to triumph.

Some said:

"Without the agreement of the Russian government the emir cannot decide a question of this nature. The Russian consul may say: 'Do not listen to the mullahs and do not kill the driver.' That is the reason why the supreme judge's petition has not been answered."

Many accepted this supposition. These people said that on his accession Emir Abdul Akhad had been recommended by the Russian government, through the Governor General of Turkestan and the Russian political agent at Kagan, to abstain from public executions. If an execution had to take place, let it be done with circumspection otherwise people abroad would say that the emir was a savage and would reproach the Russian Emperor for permitting atrocities to be committed in a country under his protection.

In support of these views people said:

"In the reign of Abdul Akhad public executions are far less frequent, if you do not consider cases of people dying under torture or at the hands of the hangman, or in prison, or in the regions where they fall into the hands of the *khakims*. But those deaths could not be called public executions and neither the Russians nor foreigners knew anything about them. But in Emir Muzaffar's reign not a day passed without a public execution on the Rope Market near the El Registan Square or without someone being hanged at the Donkey Bazaar. Moreover, at each public execution they used to kill not one or two people but a dozen or more at a time, and at the Donkey Bazaar they would hang people in rows. In Emir Muzaffar's reign they once executed over one hundred men under the eyes of the holiday-makers during a festival at Shirbadan."

The five mullahs who had accused the driver were not a little worried during those days of waiting. And although each of them declared with great confidence that the driver was going to be stoned and that the emir would not reject the mullahs' petition and would take into account the findings of the theologians, all five of them began to have their doubts as the days passed. These doubts gnawed at their hearts: if the execution did not take place it would

become known to all and their prestige would be dealt a serious blow. And the mullahs were not used to receiving such blows.

During those troublous days they paid frequent visits to the house of the supreme judge and whimpered:

"Surely His Highness is not going to turn down our petition? Surely he is not going to refuse the request of those who are so tireless in praying for his well-being, for the sake of some dishonourable driver? Why, that would be to cast shame not only on our dignity but on all the theologians of Bukhara. How can a padishah of Islam reject the interpretation of this case given by the theologians? The interpretations of Mohammedan theologians are not rejected even by the Russian authorities in Samarkand and Tashkent. A deviation from the interpretation of the theologians will be taken as a deviation from the Sharia itself."

"You yourself must understand," they urged the supreme judge, "you are the protector of the law, your task is to insist on it being fulfilled."

"But His Highness has not yet rejected your petition, has he?" the supreme judge said to placate them. "Had he done so he would have written to me about it. I think you will have good news very soon."

The supreme judge knew the reason for the delay in the reply to his petition but he did not risk passing on the information to the mullahs "whose tongues were loose." Without revealing the true reason, he gave them a broad hint:

"His Highness is pondering very carefully over this case so that there should be no idle talk later on. Therein lies the wisdom of our emir. Be patient for a few days and everything will turn out well. Better late than never."

Soon the prophecies of the supreme judge began to come true: a rumour swept the city, originating from a very well-informed man who was nicknamed Djibrail.¹ This man knew and spread all the news about state affairs before anyone else. You could believe at least a half of what he had to say.

THE NEWS OF DJEBRAIL

Before telling you of Djibrail's news let me introduce you to the bearer of this nickname.

He was the eldest son of Mullo Hamid Arab, the famed "philosopher and sage" to whom Mullo Amon of Rozmoz went in his youth to study natural science and philosophy.

Djibrail did not follow in the footsteps of his "philosophizing" father. He tried other ways of getting a reputation as "the only one of his epoch"—he always managed to dig out in advance from somewhere the latest news and to divulge it to other sensation lovers among the theologians and the emir's officers. He spent part of the money his father earned by teaching in scraping acquaintance with the emir's courtiers and with people who stood close to the prime minister and the supreme judge; with such people he maintained close contact,

¹ The Islamic equivalent of the Archangel Gabriel.

finding out from them the news of promotions and of other events, which he passed on. That was why he was called "Djebrail."

Not all his news, of course, was accurate. For that scoffers gave him the nickname of the "False Djebrail." In appearance he was said to be "like a long, cold, dark winter's night." He was blind in one eye. But his sound eye was very big and seemed to do the work of two. This sound eye was like the eye of a slaughtered cow and most unpleasant to look at. To it he owed yet another nickname—the "One-eyed Devil."

Djebrail knew that the interest of everyone, especially the theologians, was focussed on the case of the driver. And he lost no time in ferreting out the truth and trumpeting it throughout the city, thus drawing general attention to his person.

At the cost of several days' running about and working hard Djebrail found out that the emir, on receiving the petition of the supreme judge and the interpretation of the theologians, had through the prime minister asked the agent of the Russian government for advice.

The agent, in turn, had deemed it necessary to consult the Governor General of Turkestan on this important question.

According to Djebrail, the Governor General replied:

"The stoning to death of an apostate is permitted and, in fact, is required by the Sharia, but no one remembers this punishment ever having been inflicted in the noble city of Bukhara in recent times. This form of punishment has not been heard of in our times anywhere in the lands of the Moslem East. For that reason circumspection should be shown in this case, and the statement of the plaintiff mullahs and the interpretation of the theologians cannot be considered sufficient justification for inflicting this punishment. A court on the lines of those in enlightened countries should be set up. His Highness should appoint someone as prosecutor, one of the persons involved in the incident should appear as plaintiff, the others as witnesses. The defendant should have counsel to appear in court in defence of his rights. The supreme judge who bears the honourable title of "Protector of the Sharia" may preside over this court and simultaneously, in his function as supreme judge, confirm the interpretation of the legal experts and carry out the writ of the Sharia. When the guilt of the criminal has been thoroughly proved in this way, the punishment may be carried out."

Djebrail's news was conveyed in a garbled version but it spread in a flash throughout the city. The streets were again full of hubbub, and all sorts of riff-raff and sensation-seekers gathered in the squares where the execution might be expected to take place. Djunbul-mahdum turned up again in the streets, and the mullahs resumed their seats in the Kukeltash madrasah and started prating with fresh energy.

Mullo Amon flew into a rage when he heard this news. Smiling ironically, he said:

"The Governor General of Turkestan plays the role of Allah in the affairs of Bukhara, the consul at Kagan is his prophet, and our Djebrail, overhearing the talk between Allah and his prophet, now has every right to be known as

the true Djebail. But Allah is renowned for being 'the most merciful of the merciful' while this 'Allah' of our land shows himself to be 'the cruellest of the cruel.' In the eyes of the entire world he assumes the appearance of 'the bearer of civilization among the savages,' but instead of forbidding the barbarism of the mullahs he is helping it to flourish."

Two or three days later Djebail's news was confirmed: the supreme judge invited the five mullah plaintiffs to him one night and appointed Djunbul-mahdum "state prosecutor"; Muhtar-hodja was to lodge the complaint to the court that "the driver had said this and that blasphemous word and thus became an apostate." Kori Same, Abdurrahman Raftor and Keim-mahdum were named witnesses—unprejudiced people who had nothing to do either with Muhtar-hodja or the driver.

All that remained was to appoint a lawyer to defend the right of the driver to reply to the accusation.

When they heard there was to be a counsel for the defence the mullahs declared their unwillingness to appear in the presence of the driver who, they said, had always been a dishonourable man, ready to curse shamelessly on all occasions; now, they said, having lost all hope of remaining among the living, he would swear and curse to his heart's content in court, beginning with the prosecutor and ending with the emir himself.

"We shall all have ignominy heaped upon us in the presence of the large public that will be in court. On no account should the apostate appear in court; sentence must be passed in his absence."

The supreme judge was prepared to grant the mullahs' request which coincided with his own views, but it was necessary to find something in the Sharia to support it. He said:

"In that case we shall declare that the defendant is seriously ill and confer on the counsel for the defence the right to speak for him and defend his rights before the court."

The mullahs approved. As an "authoritative" counsel for the defence they selected the most violent and rascally of the people of the Prince of the Night—Kali Kurban, who was famed for his eloquence.

On the following day an assistant of the supreme judge introduced Kali Kurban into the dungeon in the Bukhara citadel where the driver was imprisoned.

He persuaded the driver to entrust Kali Kurban with the handling of his case:

"If you appear personally in court," he said to the driver, "the students of the mullahs may start a riot and then it will turn out badly for you. You would do better to entrust your case to this eloquent man who knows the Sharia well. Let him represent you and conduct your defence."

And he added: "This man will defend you against the slanders of the mullahs, but after you have been set at liberty you will have to reward him well for his services, and me for my mediation."

On hearing these words, the driver, who had been doubtful at first, decided that these people would set him at liberty in order to wring more money out of him. He confidently agreed to adopt Kali Kurban as his counsel. He gave him an account of the quarrel with the mullahs over the fare for their journey and asked him to pass it on to the court.

Kali Kurban questioned him about certain details of the quarrel and in doing so finally convinced the driver of his intention to expose the mullahs in their true colours.

The assistant of the supreme judge prepared a power of attorney in the form used in the Bukhara courts. These documents did not usually bear the signature of the principal; instead, the seal of the supreme judge was affixed as confirmation of the will of the principal. But this time the copy of the power of attorney sent to the Russian representative was adorned by the thumb-print of the driver, confirmed by the signature of the assistant of the supreme judge.

The composition of the court soon became known in the city. The public openly mocked at this court, especially at two of its members. The news that Kali Kurban was acting as the driver's counsel was received with laughter:

"A wolf to defend a sheep."

There was laughter too at the selection of Djunbul-mahdum as state prosecutor:

"The money-lender has become the champion of the right of Allah and the prophet."

Kori Usman, the biggest free-thinker and wit of the inhabitants of Labi Hauzi Arbob, said on hearing of the court's plans:

"If Allah and his Prophet cannot defend their own right and have given the job to Djunbul-mahdum, then what can we expect from such an Allah and such a prophet?"

THE RULING OF THE "COURT"

At the court, which was at once civil and ecclesiastical, the supreme judge, as usual, sat inside the courthouse near the entrance and, as was the custom on such occasions, a large mat was spread out in the courtyard, outside the door. On this mat sat the five mullahs, Djunbul-mahdum, Muhtar-hodja, Kori Same, Abdurrahman Raftor, and Keim-mahdum. Kali Kurban, representing the defendant, sat at the very edge, at some distance from the others.

The judge's clerk took from Muhtar-hodja the statement of claim, corroborated by the lawyers on the basis of the Sharia and handed it to the supreme judge. The supreme judge ran his eyes over it and returned it to Muhtar-hodja.

"The driver reviled Allah and his Prophet, he is an apostate," ran the statement.

Then he asked the plaintiff:

"Can you produce a witness in support of this statement?"

"I have witnesses," replied Muhtar-hodja, pointing to Kori Same, Abdur-rahman Raltor, and Keim-mahdum who were sitting on his left.

The supreme judge turned to them and said:

"Let us hear your testimony."

One of them affirmed:

"I bear witness before Allah, without guile or pretence, that the driver in pronouncing his blasphemies became an apostate."

The supreme judge turned to Kali Kurban, the counsel for the defence, and said:

"What do you have to say?"

"I acknowledge the sin committed by my client for he did indeed utter those words," began Kali Kurban and went on to pronounce many swear words, purported to have been told him by the driver, although they did not appear either in the statement of claim or in the evidence given by the witnesses. In this manner the counsel for the defence confirmed the accusation, without saying one word about the quarrel between the mullahs and the driver over the fares.

After that, the supreme judge read the lawyer's interpretation of the case in a loud voice so that he could be clearly heard by the counsel for the defence, the plaintiff, the witnesses, and all others present. According to this interpretation it transpired that the lawyers, on the basis of the arguments of the Sharia found it right and proper that the driver be sentenced to death by stoning.

Then, turning to Djunbul-mahdum, he asked:

"Do you, state prosecutor, agree with the findings of the Sharia, pronounced by the defenders of Islam?"

"I do not agree with the findings of the Sharia," said Djunbul-mahdum.

The supreme judge just managed to restrain a smile. The witnesses and the plaintiff exchanged looks, smiled maliciously, bit their lips, and dropped their eyes as if in shame.

General whispering broke out among the crowd.

"He is an apostate himself. Why, he says he does not agree with the findings of the Sharia! He is rejecting the Sharia."

Djunbul-mahdum, speaking loud enough to drown all this murmuring, repeated one after another all the swear words that Kali Kurban had just pronounced, adding a few more choice vulgar expressions of his own, and, attributing all of them to the driver, said:

"The driver must be publicly disgraced first, and then stoned to death."

On that the court rose. The Russian political agent advised that every word pronounced in court be carefully recorded, with the names of the speakers who should sign copies of the transcript. But the supreme judge did not consider it necessary to do this.

According to his clerk, he did not do it in case people present should say that he had turned the Sharia court into part of the judiciary of Russia.

But in point of fact, when the court rose, the supreme judge called for the scribe and dictated to him a record of all that had been said in court. Then he

called for all who had spoken and ordered them to sign what had been written in their names.

The only difficulties that arose were over the transcription of Kali Kurban's speech; the supreme judge was not familiar with all the swear words uttered by the counsel for the defence. He consulted his clerk:

"What did that shameless Kali Kurban say? Those words are very important for the accusation. That godless one said things that I've never even dreamed of. What are we to do?"

All the scribe could say was: "Sir. . . ." Pen in hand, he waited.

"I'm sure you must know those words yourself," said the supreme judge. "Write them down in the name of Kali Kurban and bring them against the driver."

"I know only a few of them," said the scribe, "but our groom can swear very well."

"Which groom? The new one? Hikmat Buz?"

"Yes, he's the one. Mullo Murzo had so much trouble with the grooms, they are such unruly fellows, that he had no choice but to appoint Hikmat Buz chief groom. He's a rowdy and a gambler, what's more, but he knows how to talk in the stables. He's as good at swearing as Kali Kurban!"

"If that is so, then send him to me."

The scribe brought in Hikmat Buz who contributed an inexhaustible reserve of swear words which the scribe wrote down in the name of Kali Kurban.

Hikmat Buz said so many appalling things that the supreme judge burst out laughing. Finally, he patted the groom approvingly on the shoulder and said:

"Well, that's enough, Hikmat Buz. You've already given us twice as many swear words as Kali Kurban and they're at least ten times more diverting than his. Well done!"

Hikmat Buz who, like Kali Kurban, was illiterate, placed an ink-smeared thumb at the foot of the statement by way of signature.

After this incident Hikmat Buz came to stand high in the favour of the supreme judge who made him one of his close attendants and then petitioned the emir to give him rank and office. Towards the end of the reign of Emir Alim, Hikmat Buz became Prince of the Night of Bukhara. During the Bukhara revolution he was shot by peasants near the Sheikh-Djalol gate.

THE EXECUTION OF THE DRIVER

When the court rose and the public learned of the sentence that had been passed on the driver the whole city was thrown into a turmoil. Not only the lazy good-for-nothings and sensation-mongers but every inhabitant of the city who could get about poured on to El Registan Square early each morning in the hope of seeing this unprecedented form of execution. And, as before, when they found nothing prepared for the execution there, they hurried off to the Donkey Bazaar and then to Soldiers' Square. Day after day, people wasted ten or

eleven hours running from place to place, dropping all their work and then, hungry, thirsty and worn out with fatigue, returning to their homes or to the shops or to their places of work.

A fortnight passed but the crowds of gapers in the streets and squares did not diminish. People knew that the driver's execution was a certainty but no one could understand the reason for this further delay. They did not know that before the sentence of the civil and ecclesiastical court could be carried out the judge had to make a report on the case to the emir, and the emir, before promulgating his decision, wanted to forward to the Russian political agent copies of the "documents" and to await his agreement.

But everything happens in good time, and one night Djebail blazed abroad the following news:

"The decision of the emir and the agreement of the political agent have been received."

Before long everyone knew that the sentence was going to be carried out early the next morning. But, as before, no one knew the place of execution. Many people hurried to El Registan Square the moment they heard the first prayer sung by the muezzin, the signal that traffic could begin to circulate again in the streets of Bukhara.

But people who lived far from the centre of the city arrived too late: they found El Registan Square packed. Crowds poured there from all directions in unbroken streams, spilling out of the dark narrow alleys, pressing against the throng already standing in El Registan Square, reeling back and jostling each other.

When it had grown quite light the pillars of the emirate—the supreme judge, the chief *rais* and the Prince of the Night—gathered in the presence of the prime minister to carry out the supreme edict. In accordance with the findings of the court, the driver was to be subjected to two punishments—he was to be led through the city and publicly disgraced, and then stoned to death.

The pillars of state decided that both punishments should take place simultaneously so that the entire city should witness not only the disgrace but also the execution of the culprit. Bukhara has no square big enough to hold virtually the whole of its population and so there was a risk of casualties arising from over-crowding.

To avert this danger it was decided to seat the condemned man on a camel which would be led through the streets. During this process anyone who "thirsted for grace" could cast a stone at the man.

Not only El Registan Square but the streets around were packed with sight-seers. That day the water-carriers could not deliver water even to the emir's palace in the Fort. There could be no question of taking the camel to the Fort either, or of leading the condemned man out and seating him on it outside the Fort. Realizing that it was beyond the power of the guards to clear the square, the authorities decided to have recourse to a ruse in order to draw the public away from El Registan Square. That is where Kali Kurban came in useful. Grasping his staff, he leaped out of the Fort, ran up to the crowd and shouting:

"Make way!" tried to force a passage.

The crowd knowing their Kali Kurban well surrounded him and bombarded him with questions:

"When are they going to execute the driver?"

"Will it be here or somewhere else?"

"Where is the criminal?"

"The driver will be stoned on Soldiers' Square," replied Kali Kurban. "That's the biggest place. He is now in the dungeon. I am going to take him out of there and have him brought to Soldiers' Square. They've already dug a trench there to bury him up to his waist. The stones are ready too. The quicker you let me through the sooner I'll bring him to the square."

That was enough for the crowd. They knew Kali Kurban as a well-informed man who stood close to the Prince of the Night, and he had barely finished his announcement when everyone rushed away from the Fort. Kali Kurban ran across the emptying El Registan Square, slipped round the main mosque and the adjacent buildings and returned to the Fort.

There were only a few people left on El Registan Square, those who knew that the driver was not in the dungeon but locked up in the Obkhana, the jail inside the Fort. Among those who remained were a few inmates of the Labi Hauzi Arbob madrasah. I too remained with them.

When El Registan Square had emptied, the camel which had



previously been brought from the Sorbonon district and left near the arsenal, was led up to the Fort and made to kneel close to the gates of the Obkhana where the prisoner was incarcerated.

The driver was brought out, his arms were bound and he was placed on the camel. Guards drew his feet under the beast's belly and tied them together there with a stout, soaped rope. The same rope was used to bind the "criminal" to the camel by his waist and shoulders and then the ends were knotted tightly. When this had been done the camel was made to stand up. Kali Kurban took the bridle.

Djunbul-mahdum was the first to fling a stone at the driver. In reply he received the driver's first strong imprecation. Then, one after another, the other four mullahs threw stones. And they too received their fill of imprecations. The supreme judge cast a stone, but missed. However, this did not save him from being roundly cursed. After him, the prime minister, the chief *rais* and the Prince of the Night hurled stones. And each in turn was cursed by the driver.

The camel was then led from the Fort through the streets of the city so that the faithful by throwing stones at the sinner could do their good deed and acquire divine grace.

The camel was preceded by Muhtar-hodja, Kori Same, Abdurrahman Raf-tor, and Keim-mahdum. Twenty paces after them walked Djunbul-mahdum, nicknamed by the Bukhara inhabitants the "Representative of Allah and His Prophet," and then, holding the bridle of the camel, walked Kali Kurban, the driver's "counsel for defence."

All of these men were surrounded by hundreds of people armed with staves, who served the Prince of the Night. Behind the camel walked about fifteen hundred people—servants of the supreme judge, the *rais* and the prime minister, and archers and executioners from the Fort. Each one of them carried a bag full of stones.

The procession passed on to El Registan Square. The executioners, stones in hand, surrounded the camel. Then they started throwing them. The unfortunate driver was no longer able to reply to his tyrants: the very first stone—as large as a fist—hurled by one of the executioners, split open his head. But stones went on striking his body.

The crowd which had been taken in by Kali Kurban's trick had left El Registan Square, but the moment the procession emerged from the Fort, the square began to fill up again. No member of the public threw a stone at the driver. There was profound pity in every eye. Some people put their hands over their eyes, others turned and went away.

The only exception was a score or so of frenzied pupils from one of the *madrasahs* (joined by the *muezzin* from the *Zahil-hadja madrasah*) who, picking up stones that had already been flung by the executioners, hurled them savagely at the driver. These men were worse than wild beasts: wild animals attack men or beast either to assuage their hunger or in self-defence. But these men, losing all resemblance to human beings, in a wild frenzy, finished off a man who was bound hand and foot.

By the time the procession had reached the Cupola of Targaron the driver was dead. But, being stoutly bound to the camel, he did not fall from its back, though his body sagged to one side. The stoning continued.

I was too sick at heart to follow this savage procession any farther. I broke away from the crowd and, slipping back to the madrasah through the lanes, took refuge in the silence of my cell.

The procession, meanwhile, after traversing many streets of the city, returned to El Registan Square. There the executioners entered the Fort and reported on the satisfactory fulfilment of their duties. This done, they waited for further instructions, not knowing what to do with the remains of their victim.

On the orders of the authorities five of the executioners led the camel, without ceremony this time, through the Ugdan gate out of the city, in order to throw the corpse to the dogs. When the camel had been forced to its knees and the rope untied, five armed men, their faces concealed with black scarves, sprang out of the tall reeds and attacked the executioners. One executioner was killed, another wounded. The other three managed to escape. Their unknown assailants wrapped the body of the driver in a cloth and disappeared into the reeds.

A week passed. One evening Mullo Amon arrived at the small Labi Hauzi Arbob madrasah. We did not recognize him at first—he had exchanged the robes of a mullah for the simple costume of a driver, a motley-coloured unlined gown with an embroidered sash round his waist. Dangling from the sash on the left side was a long ivory-haft knife. His head was bound with a blue-check cotton turban with the end sticking out like a mouse-tail. Over the blue gown he wore another, a thick wadded garment. But he still had the soft high boots, worn inside old slippers, that were the mark of a mullah.

Looking at him I remembered Yakhia-hodja who, like him, had abandoned the dress of a mullah and taken to that of an idler. When people asked him why he had done it, he either feigned madness or turned the matter into a joke. In fact, he was making fun of bad people.

Mullo Amon came to us in that humble garb looking so grim as he sat down with us that no one dared to ask him why he had changed his attire. We guessed that he was imitating Yakhia-hodja, but not for a joke.



For some minutes he sat gloomy and silent. We too had nothing to say. Finally he spoke:

"Are you surprised to see me in this humble garb? Perhaps some of you are thinking: 'The grandson of Faizi Avlie is copying the mad Yakhia-hodja of Mirakon.' No, I am not hodja of Mirakon, I am not mad, and I'm not making fun of anyone. I don't like jokes. I am a villager, the son of a tiller of the soil, and, what's more, I bear the nickname of 'grandson of Faizi Avlie the thief.' If I were to play jokes, no one would tolerate them. Please pour me some tea, my throat is parched," he said to Kori Usman abruptly.

Kori Usman dropped some tea into the pot and handed it to Kori Sharif who added hot water.

Mullo Amon went on:

"No, I am not joking, I don't like to joke. Tell me, you praters of Bukhara, have you thought about what has been happening here recently?"

No one answered.

"You all know," he went on, "that those five vile scoundrels—the base Djunbul-mahdum, that snake Muhtar-hodja, the scoundrel Kori Same, the depraved Abdurrahman Raftor, and that idler Keim-mahdum—you know what a vile thing those brazen-faced knaves did to save themselves half a tenga each. More than that, in their fanaticism they went so far as to kill a man under the cloak of religion, to kill him with unprecedented savagery, making him suffer excruciating torture. . . ."

I broke in:

"We know four of them very well. You couldn't have expected any decency from them. But what happened to Muhtar-hodja? How did he get mixed up with them? He always seemed to be a gentle soft-hearted man."

Mullo Amon gave me a penetrating look and said:

"I took you for a clever fellow but it seems I was wrong. Didn't I call Muhtar-hodja a snake? A snake is soft, soft to the touch, but that snake can kill a man with its poison, can't it? The Arabs rightly say: 'Spare me, O Lord, from the wrath of polite people' and popular sayings are based on centuries of experience, in any land."

Hot tea was served. Mullo Amon took a sip or two as if tasting the flavour and set the bowl down in front of him.

"Do you think those five blood-thirsty wolves were the only ones concerned in that savage scene of reprisal? No, during these days I have seen many well-known mullahs. Most of them fully approve of those slandering mullahs and even regard their vileness as pious zeal. Even my teacher Hamid Arab, the 'philosopher' and scientist, exulted: 'In recent times our lawyers have been losing their influence on the people. Now the common people will respect them more highly and will start consulting the theologians on every matter.' In other words, in order to make themselves respected the mullahs have to murder people. This 'philosopher' does not realize that if you make people respect you by putting the fear of death into them all you get from them is hatred."

Mullo Amon drank the rest of his tepid tea, handed the bowl to Kori Usman and continued:

"From all that it is clear that those five wolves are not alone in their attack on the flock. Behind them are concealed other wolves. That is why I always say: The whole pack of wolves must be destroyed."

He turned to Mirzo Ibrahim Subhi and said:

"Read us your satire about the Prince of the Night."

Mullo Amon thought that Subhi was the only poet among us and that the satire was solely his work.

Mirzo Ibrahim Subhi read him our satire. And Mullo Amon repeated the last couplet after him two or three times.

"It's a pity I'm not a poet," he said. "That poem is written about one person, about the Prince of the Night, and I would have rewritten it so that it attacked the whole wolf pack."

Mullo Amon sipped at a fresh bowl of tea and went on:

"Who are these savage wolves who tore the driver to pieces? The lawyers, the supreme judge, the emir. Of course the lawyers knew that the scoundrels were preparing to murder the driver for the sake of a few coins. They deliberately faked their interpretation about the punishment of an innocent man. Why did they do that? Of course the supreme judge knew that those wolves were slandering the driver. And, of course, the emir knew that too. His spies had reported to him before anyone else and told him what really happened."

Taking an occasional sip at his tea-bowl Mullo Amon reflected. Then he said:

"One day a friend of mine and I had to come to this city from Kagan. We went to the cab stand near the station. There was only one carriage there and it had a passenger in it already. I came to an arrangement with the driver about the fare and sat down beside the other passenger. The driver wouldn't let my companion get in. My friend asked him to sit next to him on the driver's seat. He explained that he had the right to take only two passengers in a one-horse carriage, otherwise he would be straining the horse. My friend could be fined for breaking that rule, he said. There was a representative of the Russian tsar in Kagan. Without his permission not even the emir or the pillars of his emirate could drink a bowl of tea. He protected horses from having to pull too many passengers, yet he agreed to the savage murder of that driver and even gave advice as to how to handle it so that neither he nor the tsar could be reproached for it."

Mullo Amon sipped a little more tea and went on:

"As for me, I have come to loathe him and all of them, especially, the mul-lahs, though I'm one myself. That's why I want at least to dress like the common people. They are the best people of our times."

Mullo Amon paused, then with a sigh, said:

"Yes, they are the best people of our times. A gambler, for example, loses, but he doesn't run away; he goes into voluntary 'servitude' until he can raise the money to pay off his debt. Even that sort of man would be ashamed to cheat

someone of his property; he respects the rights of the man he has lost to. I'm talking about knucklebone players. Yet gamblers are considered the lowest of the low in our society."

Mullo Amon fell into a brown study, and then, as if recollecting something, went on:

"Don't imagine I approve of those gamblers. No, to hell with them. Some poor fellow does a hard day's work to earn a miserable thirty-six coppers. But instead of going home for his supper he can't resist the temptation to go and lose the money gambling. Even if he wins, he has to dole out the money to the people of the Prince of the Night for the right to gamble without being punished for it. But even a poor gambler like that considers it a disgrace not to pay off his debts. But our 'defenders of the faith' who make thousands of tengas by devious means, through owning property in the madrasah, or by usury, or marrying people, or conducting similar religious ceremonies, refuse to pay thirty-two coppers to a driver who has practically carried them on his back from the Bahaud-din Tomb to the city, and then kill the man with unspeakable cruelty. There's your difference between a poor gambler and a pious mullah. I've known many a driver who has brought poor folk home in his cart free of charge; why, they don't even expect thanks for it.

"Unfortunately the drivers are credulous folk; they don't know much about people, especially people like the supreme judge and the muftis. Take that wretched man who was stoned to death. . . . When the mullahs were preparing to arrest him people let him know in time so that he could take refuge in some other city and so keep out of the mullahs' way. But he wouldn't agree. 'If they want to drag me off to court, let them do so,' he said. 'I'll tell everything that happened when I get there. Fancy those miserly fellows raising such a hullabaloo about two-and-a-half tengas! I'll tell the whole story to the supreme judge himself. He won't touch me for their empty slanders!'"

"People urged him not to trust the supreme judge but in his simplicity the driver wouldn't take any notice. 'No,' he said, 'I'm not afraid. I'm no coward to go running away.' Well, you saw how it ended."

Mullo Amon thought for a while.

"Unfortunately," he went on. "I over-estimated the courage of the drivers. When that wretched driver was led to the court, people suggested to the Faizabad drivers that some of them should hide on the route and then, when the driver was brought back from the court to prison, snatch him from the hands of the police and the Prince of the Night. But they wouldn't listen to advice. 'After all,' they said, 'a man does not die the moment he is put in prison. Even if we did manage to help him to escape, we'd be caught ourselves or we'd have to run away to Russian Turkestan and then our families would be left on their own and die of oppression. We can't do anything that would be the ruin of our families. But, if he's convicted we can collect some money and redeem him.'

"In their simplicity they didn't understand that the quarrel between the driver and the mullahs who had the authorities on their side was not an ordi-

nary quarrel. The prison warders and the people of the Prince of the Night were all afraid of the authorities and the mullahs, and no one would dare to accept a bribe to free a prisoner like that. Unfortunately, the Faizabad drivers learned the truth too late. When the wretched man was put on the camel and brought out of the Fort all the drivers of Bukhara—not merely the Faizabad ones—awoke to what was happening. But by then it was too late. Some far-sighted man realized that the victim's body was going to be thrown to the dogs somewhere outside the city. He picked four men to help him and, arming themselves the band of five, hid in the rushes near the Ugdan gate and snatched the corpse of the wretched man from his executioners. Of course, it doesn't make any difference to a dead man whether his corpse rots in the earth or is torn to pieces by dogs, but that body had to be taken for the sake of human dignity."

It was clear from Mullo Amon's words who it was that had advised the Faizabad drivers to rescue the condemned man on his way to prison and had organized the seizing of the corpse. It was, of course, Mullo Amon himself. But none of us opened our mouths about it either to him or anyone else.

THE LIFE OF MULLO AMON

Mullo Amon lived in the cell of one of his friends at the Tursundjan madrasah. He lived humbly although he had completed his studies long ago and, compared with his contemporaries, was well educated. Yet he derived no financial benefit from this fact, being reluctant to teach at the madrasah.

He received the annual stipend or *dakhyak*, given to some of the students and mullahs of the madrasah. It amounted to 120 tengas, or 18 roubles, a year. In addition, he was helped by his brothers, peasants in the village of Rozmoz, who worked the land they had inherited from their father. From maize they grew they baked loaves two or three times a month and sent them to him, and during the winter they brought their brother his share of the fatted calf they slaughtered. They also provided him with clothes.

After the incident of the driver Mullo Amon began to behave oddly. He avoided company, rarely visited his friends and received nobody in his cell. He stopped going to the little madrasah on Labi Hauzi Arbob. Each afternoon he put on a plain gown, bound his head with the blue turban with "a mouse tail," left his cell and, passing along the Chors and round Labi Hauzi Arbob Divan-beg, left the city by the straight road through the Mazar gates.

There he would sit in one of the gardens planted by the flower-sellers and, drinking tea, sink into meditation. He spoke to no one and no one knew what he was thinking about in his solitude.

Towards the end of the afternoon, when the flower-sellers and others came to promenade in the garden, he would set off for the Bikhishtien Hill where the Bukhara cemetery stretched for a considerable distance, and stay there till night-fall, returning to his cell just before the city gate was closed.

One day I followed him with the intention of enquiring about his health and, as I hoped, raising his spirits a little. I found him in that very garden where we had first met.

He responded to my greeting. I asked after his health.

"Thank you," he said, "I'm still managing to keep on my feet." Then he fell silent again.

I sat down a little way off and ordered tea.

"Don't order tea," he said. "My pot is full. I've had a bowl and that's enough for me. Have some." He handed me the pot and bowl.

As I sipped my tea I examined Mullo Amon carefully. He stared hard at me. I knew his ways: before imparting something important to his companion he would watch him attentively. And, sure enough, he said:

"I have to be left in peace now. That will be better: there's no sense in idle conversation."

He had a bunch of flowers in front of him, in the midst of which was a beautiful scented rose. He held the flowers to his nose two or three times with evident enjoyment, and handed them to me. I smelled them too and handed them back to him, but he did not take them.

"Keep them," he said and suddenly recited some lines of Saadi:

*How gladly when the flowers
were in bloom I passed
along the gardens ways!
Return with the spring, O friend,
and thou shalt see the flowers
bloom o'er the dust of me.*

He rose to his feet:

"Well, good-bye," he said. "I wish you long life. As the saying goes: 'We didn't have the luck, perhaps you will.' I wish you success." Then he crossed the garden and made off in the direction of the Faizabad fields.



The time came for the distribution of the annual stipends. This was usually done at the end of the academic year—early in March, on an appointed day. The ceremony took place in the Fort. Each stipend—there were a thousand of them in all—was rolled up in a piece of cotton cloth. The packages were then all heaped in a leather chest which on that day was placed in front of the gates of the Fort. The supreme judge and the prime minister sat on mattresses before the chest; beside the chest stood the captain of the chief lawyer,

leaning on his staff. Nearby, on a little woollen carpet, sat the prime minister's clerk with a notebook on his knees. In front of all stood the servant of the chief lawyer.

The thousand recipients of the stipends assembled and sat cross-legged waiting for the money to be distributed. This they had to do despite the rain and the mud: tradition demanded it. Besides the inhabitants of the city, people came for that day's ceremony from all the surrounding countryside and even from Russian Turkestan. But not everyone came; some were prevented by illness, some had become disqualified by earning over a thousand tengas, and some did not want to come all the way from some distant region for a paltry 120 tengas.

Subtract those who had died during the current year and there would be about 100 to 150 missing in all. The rest gathered at seven o'clock in the morning.

In Bukhara during the emirate there were practically no public spectacles. For that reason the distribution of the stipends attracted many sight-seers and idlers. Most of the population assembled on El Registan Square around the mullahs who were to receive the money and stayed there until it was time to go to work. The pupils of the madrasahs remained there till the end of the ceremony. On that day El Registan Square was packed to capacity.

At eight o'clock the supreme judge and the prime minister nodded their heads as a signal that the distribution was to begin. The clerk, unrolling a long scroll, began to call out the names. The servant standing in front repeated these names in a louder voice addressing the mullahs who had the right to draw stipends.

If there was no reply and if those present knew the reason why, someone would answer: "Dead" or: "His income's risen," or "He's ill." If the reason for absence was not known, people would call out: "Nazar" which means: "The reason for absence is unknown."

The servant, on hearing the answer, repeated it in a loud voice to the clerk. The clerk made a mark on his list and went on reading.



Those mullahs who replied: "Here" rose to their feet, straightened their gowns, tightened their sashes, smoothed their beards with their hands, and walked towards the chest. There they looked at the supreme judge and the prime minister and bowed respectfully. Meanwhile the treasurer took packet after packet out of the chest and handed them to the chief lawyer who in turn gave them to his servant. The servant distributed the packets to the mullahs and naming them one by one added the word: "Received." The clerk marked it in his book.

Each recipient bowed once more to the prime minister and the supreme judge and went off. Several mullahs, in an excess of servility, raised the packet to their lips on receiving it from the hands of the servant, kissed it, pressed it to their eyes, kissed it again and, tucking it inside their gowns, bowed once more before leaving.

Mullo Amon had been receiving a stipend for some twenty years. Five years before he had completed his studies at the madrasah, his teacher, the "philosopher" Hamid Arab, had solicited for him this "mark of learning." When, after the execution of the driver, he abandoned the dress of a mullah, we concluded that he would not turn up to receive a stipend. But he was there.

On that occasion, as in other years, I and two or three of my fellow-students went up early on to the roof of the Poyand mosque in order to watch the whole ceremony of the distribution.

Everything went smoothly until the servant called: "Mullo Amon of Rozmoz." Someone sitting beside Mullo Amon replied: "Here." Without a word Mullo Amon rose and walked towards the gates of the Fort. Those who knew him were not surprised by his unconventional attire, but among the spectators and the students a murmur arose, at the sight of his common gown and blue turban with its dangling "mouse tail." There were whispers and people asked: "Why should this nin-compoop who looks like a driver receive a stipend?"

Mullo Amon went up to the chest, turned towards the supreme judge and the prime minister, greeted them, but did not bow, received his packet and turned to leave.

Watching him go away the supreme judge beckoned to the servant and said something to him.

The servant replied in a loud voice:

"At your service, your reverence," and ran after Mullo Amon. He soon returned, preceded by Mullo Amon. The servant resumed his place and Mullo Amon went up to the supreme judge and the prime minister. He laid the packet at their feet and, making some remark, turned and walked away but not in the direction that other mullahs who had received their stipends went—he went straight into El Registan Square where he was swallowed up by the crowd.

After this interruption the distribution was resumed. Before calling out the next name the clerk made a note in his book.

When we gathered that evening in Kori Usman's cell at the small madrasah on Labi Hauzi Arbob to discuss the day's ceremony we talked of nothing except Mullo Amon's behaviour. We agreed that having decided to turn up to receive

his stipend he should have put on the dress of a mullah again to avoid placing himself in an awkward situation. We were surprised that at first he had been given the stipend without cavil, despite his dress. Generosity such as that was not customary among the authorities in Bukhara. When he was brought back and made to give up the packet of money we had all felt sorry for him, although we considered that he had acted mistakenly. We knew that the incident would upset him deeply and we all felt very worried about him.

We discussed the matter from every angle. To our surprise Mullo Amon joined our company, for the first time after an interval of seven or eight months. What was even more surprising and, above all gratifying, was to see that he looked contented, happy even. He said at once, before sitting down:

"My dear friends, you were, of course, surprised to see me dressed like that when I went to receive the stipend. I shall explain. When I discarded the mullah's robe to express my repugnance for that calling, I decided at first not to take my stipend in order to make a complete break with the mullahs. But on the day of the distribution I thought: If I don't turn up there it will provide a pretext for scoundrels to say I've lost my wits. That's what they're saying already. So I decided to go in my simple dress as if to receive money from the Fort. I was sure they wouldn't give it to me in that garb. It would give me an opportunity of saying a few words to the supreme judge so that he would realize that I had changed my costume not because I'd gone mad but because I loathe the whole pack of them."

Mullo Amon cast his eyes around our circle.

"Unfortunately," he went on, "to the surprise of all the mullahs and the spectators, including you, they gave me the money. The supreme judge, who had barely nodded in reply to the deep bows of the other mullahs, replied orally to my reserved greeting. The cunning old fox not only looked at me, he even smiled. I realized that I'd made a mistake in going there. I'd lost the chance of explaining my point of view to him personally and there was nothing left for me to do but take the packet and withdraw. That jackal of a servant said to me when he overtook me, 'The Protector of the Sharia greets you and is pleased to say: "The way Mullo Amon cares to dress is not our concern but when he comes for his stipend together with the other mullahs to the supreme Fort, he would do better to wear the gown of a mullah in order not to provoke idle talk."'"

"On hearing of this 'Kindness' on the part of the supreme judge I was delighted, for it gave me an opportunity of saying at least a word or two to him. 'Splendid' I said, and returned to him, put down the packet and said: 'If I have to change my dress in order to receive this sop which is like ashes to me I shall not accept it. I despise the mullahs, I consider most of them vile scoundrels, hypocrites without any pity for their fellow-men. That is why I discarded the robe of a mullah. I do not wish to put on that shameful robe again for the sake of a wretched hundred and twenty tengas.'

"The supreme judge replied: 'We are only giving you advice. If you don't agree that is your affair but this money is yours. Take it.'

"I did not reply. I went away. I knew this duplicity very well. With that false, smooth, hypocritical manner of his he wanted to trap me, to force me to keep my lips sealed, and then, when it suited him, to punish me.

"Well, I've unburdened my heart, if only a little," said Mullo Amon in conclusion and left the cell.

THE MEN IN BLACK CLOAKS AND MULLO AMON

In what is now the Kashka-Darya region there is a district called Chirakchi. In the days of the emirate the rulers of that district did not submit to the authority of the neighbouring regions of Karshi and Shakhrisabz but stood in direct subordination to the emir.

The rule of the emir and his officials was oppressive in all the regions of Bukhara but the violence and harshness of the regime in Chirakchi reached such a pitch that the patience of the population was well-nigh exhausted.

Those who rebelled were thrown into local prisons. The leaders were incarcerated in the dungeons of Bukhara. The least expression of discontent was ruthlessly stamped out.

All attempts to complain to the emir of the excesses of the local rulers were in vain: it was virtually impossible to get the complaint past the emir's officials, but if the plaintiff had the good, or rather the bad, luck to succeed, he received from the emir a document addressed to the very rulers against whom he had lodged his complaint. This document usually pointed out that such-or-such a person had complained of someone. "Investigate and discover whether an injury has really been done to the plaintiff, and see that justice is done."

Whenever a plaintiff gave this document to his tyrant, the "investigation" established that the complaint of the poor fellow was "without foundation," and, as they say, "salt was rubbed into his wounds," for, in addition to all he had had to endure before, he was sentenced to a beating for making a "false complaint," and then thrown into prison for an indefinite period.

The people of Chirakchi were driven to the end of their tether by this oppressive rule—"they were pierced to the heart, the knife had reached the bone"; a general uprising was brewing; people wanted to take their revenge on their rulers and then go to Russian Turkestan or to some other country and shake off the yoke of the emir and his henchmen once and for all.

In those days a man turned up in the district, who counselled them not to rebel, saying that such action would only lead to their destruction, but instead to take a complaint to the emir in the name of the whole population, calling on him to punish the Chirakchi tyrants.

"The padishah does not want to see his country in turmoil," said this man. "The emir will not permit the population which fills his treasury with taxes, requisitions, and dues to spill its blood and run away to a foreign land. Who would pay his taxes if that were to happen?"

The people of Chirakchi listened to his advice and chose two hundred envoys out of the bravest and most gravely victimized of their number, in order to send them to the emir with their complaint. They were, moreover, to tell the emir in their own words of the grievous plight of the people of Chirakchi.

The envoys donned long black felt cloaks, with only a slit cut for the head, so that they were completely enveloped in the tent-like garments. According to ancient tradition this symbolized the extremity of oppression.

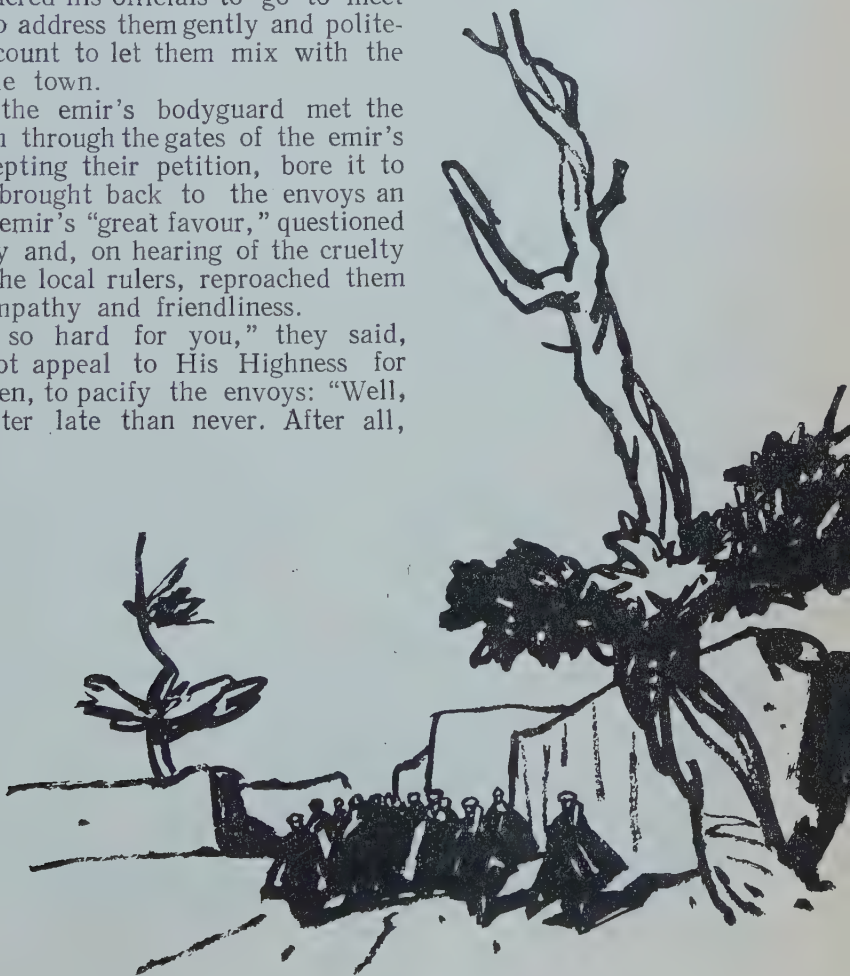
In this grim garb which horrified all whom they met on their way the envoys set out on foot over Karban mountain for Kermine where the Emir Abdul Akhad had his permanent residence.

The little town of Kermine was thrown into a flutter by the arrival of these two hundred men in their frightful black cloaks.

The emir ordered his officials to go to meet the delegation, to address them gently and politely, but on no account to let them mix with the inhabitants of the town.

Captains of the emir's bodyguard met the envoys, led them through the gates of the emir's garden and, accepting their petition, bore it to the emir. They brought back to the envoys an expression of the emir's "great favour," questioned the men carefully and, on hearing of the cruelty and excesses of the local rulers, reproached them with feigned sympathy and friendliness.

"If life was so hard for you," they said, "why did you not appeal to His Highness for help earlier?" Then, to pacify the envoys: "Well, never mind, better late than never. After all,



your complaints are well-founded. His Highness will order the prime minister to hang your tyrants by their heels and will send you just rulers to take their place."

The emir's courtiers spoke many fine flattering words to the envoys, "showered them with empty nutshells and promised them the sleeves of their waistcoats."

When night fell, the envoys were handed a document from the emir addressed to the prime minister. Then they were surrounded to prevent them speaking to the local population, led out of the town and sent off across the Chuli Malik steppe with instructions to go to Bukhara and see the prime minister.

"He will settle your complaint according to your wishes."

Highly exaggerated rumours of the appearance of the black-cloaked men of Chirakchi reached Bukhara. It was said that the entire population of the country extending from Karshi to Darvaz had risen against the oppressive rule of the Hakims and, clothed in black cloaks, had gone to Kermine, looting and pillaging wherever they went.

When it was reported that the emir had sent them to Bukhara, the city waited in fear and trembling. The merchants barred the doors of their shops and hid their wares. In frightened whispers they exchanged all kinds of wild speculations about what was to come.

The big merchants bolted the gates of their trading yards.

The keepers of the caravan-sarais, sitting cross-legged near the gates, let no suspicious-looking person inside.

A day passed and alarm at the prospect of the arrival of the cloaked men began to subside. Rumour-mongers now said that there was no one from Shirabad, Gissar, or Kukhistan among the envoys. They consisted only of representatives from Karshi, Guzar, Chirakchi, Yakkabag, Baisun, Shakhrisiabz and Kitab.

Another day passed and the situation seemed even less alarming. People said: "There are no Karshi men among them, they are only the Kenegas people from Shakhrisiabz who are only enemies of the Mangit emirs."

As this report spread the merchants grew calmer. "The Kenegas can do nothing against the Mangit," they told themselves. "If His Highness gives the orders, Haidarkul Chushka will wipe them off the face of the earth in less than no time." The merchants opened their booths again and spread out their wares, making them look as tempting as possible; they flung open the gates of the trading yards and heaved sighs of relief.

Then it was rumoured that it was a matter merely of a few poverty-stricken men from Chirakchi who had wrapped themselves up in felt cloaks because they had nothing else to wear and who had gone to Kermine on a begging expedition and were now on their way to Bukhara.

One of the merchants, sitting in his shop on the Chors, said:

"They're welcome. We'll be glad to see them. We shan't grudge a copper for them."

One day later it was being said that a few eminent people had arrived at Kermine from Chirakchi with costly gifts for the emir to gaze on the beauty of His

Highness, the Light of the World. The emir, it was said, had regaled them splendidly and expressed the wish that they should also feast their eyes on Bukhara. He had ordered retainers of the prime minister to meet his guests at Khomrabat and to entertain them. And now those guests were walking about the city and looking at the sights.

The formal language in which this piece of information was couched made it clear to all that it derived from persons close to the prime minister himself and that they were deliberately spreading it abroad.

In Bukhara there was not a sign of the black-cloaked rebels nor of any beggars from Chirakchi, nor of the distinguished guests of the emir. Like a spring thundercloud which hangs in the sky but yields no rain this news filled the people of Bukhara with fear only to evaporate and pass away without leaving a trace.

A few days passed. The rumours about the cloaked men were forgotten. And then quite unexpectedly one evening Mullo Amon appeared in Kori Usman's cell in the little madrasah on Labi Hauzi Arbob. He had not been there since the day some six or seven months ago, when the stipends were distributed. Since then he had shown no sign of himself. From his sudden appearance we knew that he had some special news to impart to us.

Without the slightest formality, without even greeting us, he said:

"In the Mirzo Ubaid madrasah there is a mullah with the nickname Madari Geti—The Mother of the Universe. His real name is Mullo Mahmud. He is over sixty but he is bald and beardless and his face like that of an old woman is covered with wrinkles, as if furrowed with little winding streams. He is from Baisun. According to what he says, during the war between Emir Muzaffar and the Kukhistan and the Shakhrisiabz people he fought valiantly against the emir's troops. He curses the emir and his officials for their savage treatment of his subjects, especially of the people of the Kukhistan and the Shakhrisiabz."

Mullo Amon drew a deep breath and went on:

"I became friendly with him when I heard of his detestation of the rulers and the mullahs. But later I discovered that he kept his jabbering for his cell and that when he was outside, in company, he behaved quite differently."

Kori Usman who always had the appropriate proverb on the tip of his tongue for every occasion broke in:

"A lion in his own house but a fallow deer in the field."

"He's worse than that," said Mullo Amon. "You'd do better to call him a shameless hypocrite. In his dark cell, alone with someone whom he knows to be dissatisfied with the behaviour of the rulers and the mullahs he complains, he curses, he flings mud at them, but when he meets a mullah or a soldier he bows so low and flatters them so profusely that you'd think he was about to lick their filthy shoes. When I realized what a hypocrite he was I kept out of his way. But during those days when there were so many rumours about the cloaked men he met me in the street and drew me into his cell. There he told me about the trip he made last summer to Shakhrisiabz, and whispered: 'The state of the people of Chirakchi is extremely difficult. Life has become impossible for them. It was

I who advised them to clad themselves in black cloaks and to go to the emir to complain about their rulers. They took my advice.'"

Mullo Amon told us in Madari Geti's words the story we already knew.

"As soon as I knew that the wretched people had been deceived and sent to Bukhara," Mulla Amon told us, "I intended to persuade them to turn back so that they should not fall into prison and disappear without a trace at the hands of the emir's executioners."

He described how he had gone out to meet the emissaries from Chirakchi and had found them at Khomrabat. They showed him the document from the emir which they were taking to the prime minister. In it was written: "Help these people in their need. Our courier is bringing to you detailed instructions."

Mullo Amon told the cloaked men: "The courier will reach the prime minister before you and hand him instructions to destroy you. If you value your lives, go back where you came from and do what you can there."

They would not listen to him. "The emir and his people were kind to us, they will not deceive us," they said.

Just then the prime minister's men arrived in Khomrabat from Bukhara in covered carts. They brought with them a large number of robes which they made the envoys put on instead of their black cloaks. Then they divided them up into groups of nine or ten and brought them into Bukhara in carts. Each driver was instructed to enter the city by a different gate and each cart set out separately.

Noticing Mullo Amon among the envoys, the men of the prime minister suspected that he had been inciting the envoys to mischief. They asked them about him.

The envoys replied that they did not know him and that this was the first time they had seen him. But dressed in the new robes that had been presented to them and having complete confidence in the emir they made no secret of the fact that Mullo Amon had instigated them to turn back.

Mullo Amon guessed what had happened, slipped away quietly and under cover of darkness took a roundabout road out of Khomrabat.

From what Mullo Amon told us, the people of Bukhara did not notice the arrival of the men from Chirakchi only because the carts entered the city from various directions, one at a time. The prime minister's retainers met each cart with respect and attention as it came on to El Registan Square and led the groups of envoys one by one into the Fort. There they were taken into the prison yard. And that was the end of honours and respect for them; they were stripped of their robes, their necks and feet were fettered and they were submitted to unspeakable tortures.

When night fell they were brought together. The youngest and bravest of them were picked out and in groups of five or ten they were sent down to the dungeons and killed. Their bodies were destroyed. A few decrepit old men who already had one foot in the grave were incarcerated in the Chardjui prison, and on the frontier of Bukhara and Khiva in Kobakli and Uchuchok.

Then by an edict of the emir the instigators of the rebellion and their supporters were taken out of Chirakchi one by one and brought to the prisons of Bukhara.

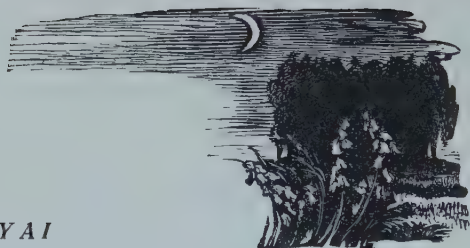
Having told us all these things, Mullo Amon rose and left the cell quickly. We were deeply grateful to him for having told us the truth, for we, like all in Bukhara, had been puzzled at the sudden way the rumours about the cloaked men had died down. That was the last time any of us met Mullo Amon.

He went on living in Bukhara for a few more years, shunning company and leading a solitary life. Unless it was essential to do so, he never met anyone and never paid a social call. We had no news of him at all during those years; he never came to see us; we never ran into him in the street. All we knew was that he was in Bukhara, in good health, and that he lived in the same cell as before, in the Tursundjan madrasah.

One day, several years after our last meeting, a rumour arose that Mullo Amon had disappeared without trace; no one had seen him alive or dead. According to his neighbour, he had said "I'm going home to Rozmoz," left the cell and had not come back. A few days later his brothers reached Bukhara. From them we learned that Mullo Amon had not arrived in Rozmoz. His brothers spent a whole year looking for him in Bukhara and in the adjacent villages but they found no traces of him.

Some thought that he had gone out of his wits and thrown himself down a well or into some ditch. Others concluded that his enemies had done away with him. But no one could say for certain. . . .

Translated by Ralph Parker
Illustrations by Andrei Livanov



ELLYAI

**THROUGH FOREST GREEN
I'LL LIGHTLY TREAD**

Through forest green I'll lightly tread,
I'll climb each nearby hill;
And of the deep blue sky o'erhead
My eyes shall drink their fill.

The misty blue cannot surpass
Your eyes so blue, so fair,
Nor spring's first leaves and tender grass
Your soft and silken hair.

By mountain streams I'll walk along,
By torrents fast and clear,
I'll listen to the water's song
That charms the grateful ear.

I'll watch the heavens cleft in twain
By spring's first thunderburst
That showers down its silver rain
To quench the flowers' thirst.

And if an old man I should meet,
We'll talk of deeds long done;
And as we rest our weary feet,
In me he'll find a son.

Old women, too, will welcome me
As wanderer returned
From distant lands across the sea—
A son, long lost, long yearned.

At dawn of day, on virgin soil,
The tractors' hum I'll hear;
The merry drivers at their toil
For me are brothers dear.


Perhaps a maid, with friendly eye
Will greet me on my way;
And with a brother's cheerful cry
I'll wish that maid "Good day."

Should I espy two blossoms fair,
I'll whisper this to you:
"See how they bloom this happy pair—
"Like us, like me and you."


And if beneath the moonlight pale
A slender birch I see—
Have you not sought this peaceful vale,
My dear, to think of me?

Translated by Louis Zellikoff

The Book



The Institute of Literature had commissioned me to roam about the country in search of ancient manuscripts and books. I had been penetrating deeper and deeper into the Kara Kum desert until I came, one day, to a cattle-breeding aul, tucked away in a hollow amidst the sands.



My arrival aroused the usual curiosity. Who was I, everyone wanted to know, where from, and what had brought me to their parts? I explained. In this aul, the collective-farm chairman, with whom I was stopping, informed me that old Velmurat-aga had just the kind of a book I was looking for.

"A rare treasure. Everybody praises it. I've heard it read myself. Velmurat-aga says it ought to be kept in a golden coffer. And what that book had cost him! Ask anybody around here how Velmurat-aga bought it. Only let me warn you, the old fellow dotes on his book; he won't part with it for anything."

Just what sort of book it was the chairman didn't explain. All I could get from him was that its aged owner was deeply attached to his "rare treasure." I knew by experience that these desert nomads thought the world of books. Even if a man was illiterate, he held on to them. If I can't read them, he would say, my sons will when they grow up.

I found Velmurat-aga at home when I went to call on him. He was a tall, comely old

man with a smoothly plucked chin and a handsome beard that fanned over his chest. He welcomed me kindly, but watched and listened to me with a question in his eyes, noting my manners and my accent.

"Draw nearer the fire, good youth," he invited, as I was about to lower myself to the felt carpet at a respectful distance from it. As soon as I was seated he began to question me.

"Where are you from?"

My reply roused his interest and he remarked that he had never been to Ashkhabad.

"Where were you born? Of what tribe? Where do your parents live? What do you do?"

I gave him the brief particulars of my life and origins and told him I'd been sent by a research institution to seek for old books.

"Ah, that is good," he approved.

Stroking his handsome beard, he studied me intently again, as if to read my face. He had the keen eyes of a steppeland hunter. At last he seemed to make up his mind. Turning to his wife, who was busily going back and forth about her household duties, he said briefly:

"Get our book out."

Without a word she went over to an old saddle-bag of carpeting hanging on one of the inner poles of the tent, reached deep into it and brought out a big package wrapped in a silk shawl. Carefully she unwrapped the book and solemnly, as though it were a sacred relic, handed it to her husband. Once again old Velmurat-aga gave me a searching look.

"If you have named your profession rightly," he began, "you will recognize its worth at once. And I will then know yours. Here it is. Look." He handed me the book and added excitedly: "Now say, have you ever seen its like? It's . . . why, just see for yourself. Every word in it is alone worth a mother-camel and her young one."

The big, heavy book was bound in faded cloth that still bore traces of a pattern of crimson flowers. On each page were some two dozen lines traced in cherry red in clearly legible Arabian script. The scribe who copied it had apparently known his craft well and had done his work conscientiously. The letters were evenly spaced, as well matched as peas in a pod. The book had obviously been much read. Its leaves were frayed and countless thumbs had left dark smudges on their lower corners. For years and years fingers had slowly followed each line, and their readers had been hundreds.

I leafed through the manuscript eagerly, reading a line or two here and there. It was just what I wanted—the rare find for the sake of which men of my calling spend sleepless nights, hurrying on from one aul to the next, knocking at thousands of doors. I might have passed through a good many more villages and knocked at a good many more doors before I'd have found another manuscript as dear to my heart as this one.

I hid my jubilation as well as I could, but Velmurat-aga, it soon became clear to me, was well aware of the value of his treasure. "Every word in it is alone



Nurmurad Sarykhanov, (1904-1944) one of the first realists in Turkmen literature, was born in the Geok-Tepin district, Ashkhabad region. After his graduation from the Ashkhabad Polytechnical Institute he served in the Red Army for a few years. He was a contributor to and later editor-in-chief of a military newspaper.

He was strongly influenced by classical Russian literature. "As a writer, I am deeply indebted to Chekhov," he himself wrote. He began to appear in print in 1932.

Faithful character-drawing and a gentle humour are the salient features of his stories about the work, thoughts and feelings of ordinary men and women. His best-known stories are *The New House*, *The Last Tent*, *Love*, *The Dream*, *The Bai's Anger*, and *The Book*. The last-named is presented in this issue.

Sarykhanov joined the army in the early months of the Great Patriotic War and fell in battle in 1944. Just before leaving for the front he completed a novel called *Let There Be Light*, a story of progressive German workers and their struggle against fascism. From the front lines he contributed to newspapers several sketches and short stories later published in book form.

worth a mother-camel and her young one," he repeated. "Look where you will, you'll never find its like." To test him, I read a few passages aloud at random, and invariably, after the first ten lines, he'd add the next hundred from memory; I'd start a verse, and he'd finish it. And after each one he would ask:

"Now do you believe me? Do I not speak truly when I say this book ought to be kept in a golden coffer?"

Carried away, his voice rising and falling in a sing-song, he recited what must have been his favourite poem.

"What do you think of that, eh? The more you read it, the more it grips you. Just try and say every word of it isn't worth a she-camel."

I made no objection; he was perfectly right. Only, I wondered, how could I buy the book from him? I must have it; that was certain. But where was I to get camels enough to pay for every word? And how could I even broach the subject? There he sat, praising his treasure to the skies. Even his wife, it seemed, was wild about it. Nor, to listen to him, would his fellow-villagers agree to let so rare a thing pass into the hands of a stranger. My hopes sank. I thought of all the rare books I had bought in other places. Some of them had been highly prized by their owners, but never had I seen so consuming a passion as this. Old Velmurat-aga was so full of the merits of his book, he wouldn't let me get a word in edgewise. My wisest course, I decided, would be to pretend I was not really so very interested in it. To change the subject, I asked whether it was true that the people of his aul were planning to move to the Amu Darya and settle down there to an agricultural life. The old man answered my questions and returned to the book. Friends and relatives often came to borrow it, he told me, and all of them admired it. He was very proud to be its owner and would never part with it.

Back at the chairman's, I admitted my discomfiture.

"I don't know how to handle him," I said.

"Tell me how to get around him. Otherwise, I'm afraid, not only won't he sell it to me, he may not even let me copy it."

But the chairman could give me very little hope.

"None of us would dare advise him to sell the book. If you need it so badly, find a way of getting round him. I warned you from the first, didn't I?"

The one thing I knew was that I was not going to give up. That evening I called on Velmurat-aga again. And again he welcomed me kindly.

"Come in, good youth. Seat yourself close to the fire. I know well that he who has seen my book will not soon go from me. You are not the first and you will not be the last."

He reached into the saddle-bag, pulled out the same silken shawl and extracted the book from it.

"Here, read it, if you like. Now you see that every word of it is"

"Oh, yes, by all means. You are quite right," I interrupted and began to leaf through the book slowly, as though reluctantly.

"Velmurat-aga," I began, feeling my way cautiously.

"Yes?"

"Have you had it long?"

"Forty years."

"Forty?"

"Yes, my son."

"Oh, that's why you know parts of it by heart! Now I understand."

"Not only parts of it," he corrected me, "every word of it. I can recite all the songs in the order they come, from cover to cover. Their words are engraved on my heart."

"But that is wonderful!" I exclaimed. "Then you don't really need the manuscript itself any more."

Velmurat-aga cast a sharp glance at me. His eyes questioned and reproached me: "So that's what you're after! That's what has brought you to my tent!"

Feeling horribly embarrassed, I blurted out:

"Ask any price you like, only let me have it. Sell it to me!"

A violent change came over the old man: his eyes dilated strangely, his beard bristled and seemed to spread. His wife too was horrified. With a shudder she sat down abruptly, both hands clutching at the collar of her dress, and froze still. The very tent seemed to tremble at my words. I even fancied I saw the wineskins on the wall rock and the switches and ropes hanging from the ceiling sway. I sat breathless. Velmurat-aga recovered himself at last, snatched the book from my hands and thrust it to his wife.

"Put it away," he said sternly.

I was lucky he didn't show me the door at once. I shouldn't have been the least surprised if he had. When, after a long silence, he addressed me again, his voice was barely audible.

"Good youth, have not my wife and I told you that this book will never leave our hands? There are some who say there is nothing on this earth that cannot be bought and sold, but not I. You are my guest, and I tell you again, from

the bottom of my heart: ask not for the book. We can understand each other easily, I think. For the book to become yours, you must first have my consent, isn't that so?"

"Of course," I hastened to agree. "How else?"

"Well, and that you will never have."

My heart dropped.

"Even should I agree," he continued, "my son and my wife would not. And if they should, the village would not surrender it at any price. No, and again no! We will not part with it. Even during the famine, when there was not a crust in the house and we had no heart for reading books, it never entered our heads to sell it. And now? But why waste words? Who has seen this book with his own eyes, knows its worth. Why, if you knew what it cost us, you would never dare ask for it."

He paused for a moment or two, and then went on, softly, as though to himself.

"Shall I tell you how it came to us, I wonder? I don't like to talk about it, I don't want to become a byword. As it is all you hear is: 'How Velmurat bought a book,' 'Like Velmurat and his book.'"

"Oh, please, Velmurat-aga! Please tell me about it," I begged. "I want to know the story of your book."

"Very well," he agreed, with a determined slap of his hand on the felt rug. Squaring his shoulders, he raised his head and stared before him for a while, recalling events long past.

2

"Listen, good youth," he began. "I am 65 years old. If you want to know this story, be prepared to hear what happened forty years ago. For it is just forty years ago this autumn that the book became mine. The year I bought it was called the cold year. I was a shepherd then, as I always had been.

"Don't let it fool you that I've put on weight now and can't get into my coat; I was born and bred a shepherd. From the time I was a tiny shaver I lived amidst the sands, looking after sheep. Of course, I'd never seen a book in my life. I'd heard there were such things, but that's all.

"And here is what happened. I acquired a family and got us a tent; then I bought a she-camel—of a very good breed and already with young. Since I was coming up in the world, I decided to lay in a store of grain for the winter. I loaded my camel with wool and charcoal burnt down from saksaul and started off for Arkach.¹ I knew no one there so I stopped over for the night at the house of the man who bought my wool and charcoal. He was a rich man. In the evening his house filled up with guests, young men and old. My eye was at once attracted to one of them—a richly dressed man with a fat red face and a beard like a shovel.

¹Arkach—a small town in the southern part of Turkmenia, amidst the foothills of Kopet-Dagh.

"‘Honourable mullah,’ the others addressed him, ‘won’t you do us the kindness to read to us?’

"And they handed him this book. But the mullah stubbornly refused.

"‘Fools!’ he cried, ‘this book was written by a madman who spat on our holy faith. He filled his head with worldly thoughts and his book teaches evil and vice. It may be read once a year, perhaps, no more, lest it contaminate you. Far better that I should read you this,’ and he pulled out from under his robe a book he had brought with him.

"But the other guests were even more stubborn than the mullah. One of them promised him a gift and he gave in. Raising his voice high he went through page after page. Oh! He read until midnight and long past. How his tongue could keep up with him was a marvel. And I listened wonder-struck. I forgot everything under the sun, trying to understand what was happening. How could a man just sit there looking at sheets of paper and utter such wonderful thoughts? As if someone were telling me the story of his life, only when I listened more closely it seemed it was my life he was telling about. And the words, tripping out one after the other, were such as sometimes came to my own mind. Heartfelt, simple words. I’d never imagined a book could be so exciting, that it could speak of life so wisely and make you understand and feel everything so deeply. Just as it bewitched you today, good youth, so it did me that time. It must be beyond all price, I thought to myself, in all likelihood such things were not bought and sold at all. My heart burned with longing. If the book had a price, I decided, and it was one I could raise, I would buy it. Only I felt very doubtful that a poor shepherd like myself could manage to buy such a treasure. I didn’t sleep a wink that night for thinking and worrying about it, and wondering who could have thought out such words, what mortal could have strung them together like that. Perhaps the book had dropped from the skies?

"In the morning, the moment I saw my host, I put my question to him.

"‘Is the book the mullah read to us last night very costly?’

"‘It has no definite price,’ he answered with a laugh. ‘A book is not a lady’s kerchief or a sack of charcoal. It is not easily priced.’

"‘Oh, but do set a price, name your price,’ I insisted.

"My host exchanged glances with the other men present and again he laughed at me.

"‘Its price is a camel,’ he said mockingly. ‘A good camel, nothing less.’

"It may be that he merely meant it as a jest, but I took him at his word and my heart rejoiced. What luck that it cost only one camel! Without the least hesitation I decided to part with the camel that had carried me to Arkach.

"‘If that is its price,’ I said, ‘take my camel, a fine she-camel, and with young. Take it, and give me the book.’

"‘Very well,’ he agreed in the same mocking tone. ‘Leave your she-camel, take the book, and God speed to you.’

"And so I took a last look at my lovely camel, tucked the book away beneath my robe and started on my way home—on foot. Three days, I walked. I reached home weary and footsore. My old woman" (Velmurat-aga called her that

by habit: his wife could hardly have been twenty at the time) "met me at the door with a cry.

"Oh, oh, where's our she-camel? What have you done with her? Don't tell me you've lost her! Or have evil thieves stolen her? Ai, a-ai!" she wailed wildly, her fingers clutching at her collar, ready to rend her clothes in grief.

"Wait, wait! Hush!" I answered. 'You've cause for rejoicing, not weeping. Our fine camel has done well for us. She has brought us . . . this,' and I brought out the book. 'See,' I said, 'here, under this cloth binding, every word is worth a pedigree camel. I'll tell you all about it and you'll see.'

"My wife looked at the book, took it in her hands, opened it, glanced at the pages, touched it to her forehead and brushed it across her face, taking it for a sacred thing. Then she sighed deeply and stared at it perplexed, not knowing whether to laugh or to cry. I knew she was thinking of the camel—we were poor and that camel had been our mainstay, our only hope.

"So she stood, thinking her sad thoughts. 'Don't grieve,' I repeated, wanting to lift the weight off her heart. 'We've made a good bargain.' And I told her about that night when the mullah had read to us and how everyone had listened, and how I myself had listened and could hardly sit still for excitement. I repeated some of the lines that had engraved themselves in my mind for ever.

"'Every word of this is here in this book,' I assured her. 'Only I tell it to you poorly, can't repeat a single word of it properly. Don't grieve, wife.'

"But she could not forget the camel. Her eyes filled with tears.

"'Every word written here is worth a she-camel,' I assured her again, but she was not comforted. The tears rolled down her cheeks.

"'You may as well admit it, you've given the camel away for nothing,' she wept. 'The one hope of our home is lost. They swindled you, you've brought home a heap of paper, nothing more.'

"What could I do? I argued, of course. I turned the pages of the book and tried to convince her.

"'If only your woman's wit could grasp what is written here!' I exclaimed. 'If only that mullah with the shovel-beard could appear right now, you'd forget the camel at once.'

"But there was the rub: all those wonderful words in the book, all those songs, and they were locked away from me. The book was silent, it would not utter a sound, as though deliberately to mock my wife and me. I began to feel so vexed with it myself, I was almost ready to hurl it to the ground. But there it lay in my hands, innocent of wrong. All it wanted was a man who could read, but where was such a one to be found in our desert? I went into the tent. I felt so sore at heart I could not even drink a cup of tea after my long journey and I wandered restlessly out again. Now I was sorry I had bought the book.

"Later, advised to consult a man famed in our parts for his wisdom, I looked him up. I had a book, I shamefacedly admitted, and couldn't read it; wouldn't he name someone who could?

"How do you come to have it?' he asked in surprise.

"I bought it cheap,' I said.

"He gave me a smile and shook his head over me pityingly.

"I am afraid you are a foolish young man. Where were your wits? Why did you buy the book? Even if it had been offered you free, of what use could it be to you? Books want learned men to read them. And where will you find them? In all our aul there is not one. Nor will you find any in the neighbouring auls. Who, then, will read your book? Did you stop to think of that?"

"What he said was all very true and I had to agree with him.

"Well, and after that it got worse and worse for me. My old woman grumbled day and night, she almost drove me wild. I consulted other men, visited the neighbouring villages, but nowhere did I find one who could read. It was as though there were a conspiracy. Always the same remark: 'But you're a shepherd, the poorest of the poor, what nonsense have you taken into your head? What good is a book to you?' And I began to give up. One day I came home, took my treasure and buried it at the bottom of the saddle-bag, under a heap of trash. 'Let my eyes not see you any more,' I said, 'that my heart may rest from fretting!'

"So the book lay at the bottom of the bag for a year, and two years, and seven years. And for seven years my wife never ceased lamenting: 'Oh, what a fine camel it was, a breeder. Three times it would have borne us young. Why, we would have been rich by now, with never a worry to plague us.'

"Day in and day out she bewailed our lot. Poor thing, after all, she had never once heard the book read. To all my praise of it she turned a deaf ear, although secretly she was very curious to know exactly what was in it. The time came when she herself began to say that we must find some way of having it read to us.

"And then, one day, as we were sitting and drinking tea, she said:

"Only the mullahs and the ishans can read and write. And if they can, they must be able to teach others too. Perhaps we should place our son Murat-jan under one? He'll learn from him and then he'll read the book to us. They say Akchi-ishan is better learned than any other. Let us send our son to him, we'll manage at home without his help somehow. The boy is old enough to learn now.'

"My wife's words gladdened me. Myself, I was ready for anything, only to read the book. And so we settled it between us. I took the boy—he was eight years old then—and brought him to Akchi-ishan.

"I've come to you from afar with a humble request,' I said to him. 'Will you not teach my son to read and write? As long as he is with you, let it be as laid down: his body is yours, his bones mine. If he wants beating, beat him; if something needs doing, have him do it. Only teach him to read.'

"The ishan was encouraging.

"You do well to bring your son to me. Who has eaten of my salt, who has had the benefit of my training, is bound to grow into a man of account. You will see what I will make of your son if I take him in hand. Come back in four years' time and you will not recognize him.'

"I believed the ishan and flew home on wings. 'Don't grieve,' I told my wife, 'we'll manage somehow for four years, and then you'll see. The hour is near when you will yourself say whether my purchase was a mistake or not.'

"And so the book lay in the saddle-bag another three years and some months. Time passed slowly. Murat-jan, I thought, must have learned something by now. Too impatient to wait any longer, I hurried to the ishan. And what did I find! My son toiled all day long, doing chores for the ishan and his wife. Not only had he not learned to read and write, it was a marvel he hadn't lost what wits he was born with, he was worked so hard. The moment he saw me, he burst into tears.

"Take me home, father,' he begged, 'take me away quick. Akchi-ishan has only starved me and worn me out with work; he teaches me nothing. He is an ignorant man, he knows nothing of learning.'

"I clapped my hand over the boy's mouth and forbade him to speak such words. It was sinful to say the ishan was ignorant.

"Shame, shame, son, you're a small boy yet, you have no understanding.'

"But he tearfully insisted:

"Akchi-ishan can't even write out a charm. He can't read or write a single letter. If anyone comes to him for a charm he just gives him a pinch of salt, ordinary salt like what mother keeps in a little sack. I'll never learn anything from him.'

"Again I tried to hush the boy.

"You're still young and foolish. It's not for you to judge your betters. Why, the whole aul honours him, he is known far and wide as a wise and learned Moslem. For three years you have eaten his bread, and now you dare speak ill of him!'

"But Murat-jan only cried the harder.

"If you don't take me home, father, I'll run away. I won't stay here another day!'

"The boy had me upset and worried. To satisfy myself that all was well, I called on Akchi-ishan's neighbour. What do you think, I asked him, will the ishan teach my son to read and write? That neighbour was a plain, modest man. He told me all he knew about the ishan. Murat-jan, it seemed, was right about his lack of learning. The ishan could neither read nor write; he had never studied anywhere. But the curious thing was that though he had no learning, he was held in higher respect than many educated mullahs. And the reason for that was that he had descended from a mighty family. The whole village pronounced the names of his forbears with fear. No one dared speak ill of them, for the ishan's family possessed magic power.

"One day,' the neighbour told me, 'a peasant stole a bundle of hay from this Akchi-ishan's grandfather, who was also an ishan. But when he got home with the hay he couldn't get it off his back. He called his son, but the son couldn't pull it off either. Sad and repentant, the thief went to replace the hay where he had got it. But still it clung to his back. All night the wretched man hauled his burden about the aul. There was nothing for it but to go to the owner and beg his forgiveness. 'Ishan-aga, I have done wrong. All night I have carried my sin on my back. My penitent soul is racked with grief. Let your forgiveness ease it, ishan-aga. See, your hay still bows my back. Remove it.' The ishan forgave the thief. He sent him back to the spot where he had taken the hay and there, at his word, the bundle dropped from the man's shoulders. Who the peasant was no

one knows, but all the old men hereabouts know the story and often tell it. The grandfather was a sorcerer, and so is Akchi-ishan. He works through salt. He has only to blow on a handful of salt and speak some magic words for the childless to bear children and the ailing to be healed.

"When I heard this," continued Velmurat-aga, "my mind was made up. I had no wish for Murat-jan to learn to blow on salt. I took my son home and sent him to work as a herdsboy.

"The boy grew and he was paid for his work. We were very poor at that time and had as much need of our son's help as of his learning.

"So month after month passed, and year after year. The dust rose over the steppes and settled down again. In the spring we moved on to fresh pastures, in the autumn returned to this valley. And meanwhile the book still lay at the bottom of the bag. Sometimes I would take it out and longingly turn its pages. I would sit down like the mullah and hold the book just as he had; I would finger it all over, but nothing would happen. It would only make my wife feel bad, reminding her of her old sorrow, and she would grumble again: 'How rich we would be if not for that foolish purchase. We'd have had a whole herd of pedigree camels by now!'"

5

"And then, at last, came the happy day when Soviet power came to the auls," continued Velmurat-aga. "Teachers appeared and brought books with them. To our aul too there came a teacher. He fixed up a tent as a schoolroom and began to gather together the children and adults who wanted to learn to read. You can't imagine how happy I was to see him. I felt he had been sent by the new power specially for my sake. In their ignorance many of our folk eyed him askance at first and kept their children away from him, but I took a liking to him from the first. I told him about my book, of course, and he asked me to show it to him. He kept it for a day or two and then returned it, saying:

"'You made a good bargain, Velmurat-aga. You have in your hands one of the most valuable of all Turkmen manuscripts. It has caused you and your wife much suffering, but it is worth it. A long time it has lain silent, now it has not long to wait. Send your son to school, he will learn to read and write. He will not have to chop wood and fetch water for me, as he did for the ishan; I need no work-hand. Your boy will go to school the appointed time, then he'll sit down and read this book to his mother and father. There will be other books too, and he will read them all to you. And when you have need to write something, he will write it for you.'

"Those were the teacher's words and I knew at once they were not idle ones. Murat-jan was out in the steppes with the flocks. I went after him to tell him I wanted to place him under a mullah again. You will study, I told him, and then you will read your mother and father the precious book we have been treasuring these many years. But Murat-jan would have none of it. 'No,' he said, 'I won't go to study; I never want to see a mullah or an ishan again. They say Soviet power

has come to the towns and auls now. Akchi-ishan's wife cannot make me chop wood and fetch water any more.' Again I had to plead and argue. 'But you must understand,' I explained, 'that the mullah who has come to our aul is called a teacher. He has opened a school in a tent and many boys like you and even grown-ups go there every day to learn from him. The teacher himself said to me: "Let Murat-jan come; he will learn to read and write in the appointed time." He is not an ordinary mullah, that teacher, but one of those whom the new power sends specially to teach the people in the auls. He wants no work-hands, neither does he ask to be paid for his learning.'

"I finally persuaded Murat-jan and brought him back with me. The teacher had spoken the truth. He made no extravagant promises, he worked no miracles, like Akchi-ishan; he did not blow on salt. Little by little, our son, living at home with us and helping his mother around the house, learned to read and write. Today, by the way," added Velmurat-aga, "our Murat-jan is manager of a livestock farm in the neighbouring district.

"And so our son learned to read and write, and then he got the book out of the bottom of the saddle-bag and read it to us from cover to cover. I came to understand then that books are not written in the heavens, that their meaning is within our understanding. This book even contained songs that we shepherds knew of old and sometimes sang in the steppes. Most of the poems, as you can see, speak of good and evil, of human truth, and of men's courage when they defend their truth and their happiness. And it came to me then too that that time the mullah with the shovel-beard had read the book, he had marred it. He recited in a nasal sing-song, distorting the words, pronouncing them in a foreign way. When I bought the book, it appeared, I hadn't appreciated even a hundredth part of its beauty. When my own son read it to me at this very hearth, read it simply and slowly, in plain Turkmenian, it came to me as a revelation. After that my wife, and the whole aul too, agreed that Velmurat-aga had had the better of it in exchanging his camel for this book.

"So at last my wife ceased to scold me and my neighbours ceased to jest over my bad bargain.

"There you have the story of the manuscript," concluded Velmurat-aga. "Now you know the years of suffering it cost us. Who, knowing that, could dare take it from me? Why, there's not a man in the aul would not curse me if I gave it away. Here it is—read it as much as you like, read it to anyone who cares to hear it. But put out of your head for ever the idea of parting me from it."

4

It was long past midnight when Velmurat-aga finished his story. I could have no doubt now that as long as he lived he would never let the book go. Further attempts at persuasion were useless. Even if I told him that we would have the manuscript printed in Ashkhabad and then every man in his aul would be able to get a copy of it, that if he would let me have it now I would return it to him intact in two or three months, he would not listen. No arguments, I knew, could

carry any weight with him when his whole life had been so directly influenced by the book. It would be easier to obtain his permission to copy it.

We were on a sufficiently friendly footing by now. As we sat drinking tea and talking amicably of this and that, I chose a suitable moment to broach the subject again

"Velmurat-aga."

"Yes?"

"I have a great favour to ask of you."

"What favour; good youth?"

"If you would let me have . . ."

"Oh, oh, oh!" he interrupted with a laugh, stroking his beard with both hands. This time he did not explode with anger; he did not take my words seriously. My great interest in his book only flattered him. His loud, rumbling laughter roused his wife, who had already retired on the other side of the hearth. She looked round at us enquiringly, then, reassured, buried her head under her blankets again.

"No, my dear young friend and guest, I will not let you have it. Who sells such books, knows not their value. Once again I tell you: there are things on this earth that are not for sale at any price."

"But someone sold it to you."

"And a bad bargain he had of it."

He laughed loudly again with childlike pleasure and pride in his treasure.

"You are right, Velmurat-aga, some things are not for sale," I agreed, "but there are times when such a thing may be lent to a person one trusts."

I wanted old Velmurat-aga to realize that I would not go from him empty-handed. We talked it over seriously, in complete understanding of each other, until at last he took pity on me and said:

"Good youth, if you like my book so well, sit you here and copy it."

After these words we both fell silent. Outside the tent too there was the stillness that comes to the desert just before dawn. The glowing embers at our feet had long since died out and even the ashes were cooling. Beside the hearth Velmurat-aga's wife slept peacefully, wrapped in her blankets. I knew that there was no more to be said.

"Thank you. Tomorrow morning I will begin copying your book."

For two weeks, from morning till nightfall, I sat at Velmurat-aga's fireplace copying the precious manuscript. And for most of that time he sat by my side the while, sometimes dictating to me from memory, other times just watching me at my task.

"I've learned to read, but I'm afraid I never will be able to write. I started out too late," he remarked again and again.

His wife served us green tea and the flat loaves of bread called *churek*. Occasionally she would bring in a foaming jug of strong *chal*.¹ We became good friends and I even moved right in with them for those two weeks.

¹ *chal*—a fermented liquor prepared from camel's milk.

The poems that Velmurat-aga had preserved for forty years were penned by a famous Turkmenian poet. I brought them to Ashkhabad. To them, scholars added many more, collected in auls throughout Turkmenia. Soon there will come off the press a great big book—the complete works of this poet. I await its appearance impatiently. I mean to take ten copies of it and hasten back to my old friend.

"I see it was not in vain that you copied my book, every word of which is worth a she-camel and its young," he will say.

And I, in my turn, will tell him that now the book will be read not by one man alone and not by ten. The entire Turkmenian people will read it, and then it will be translated into other languages and read in Moscow and Tashkent, in the Ukraine and in the Caucasus. The whole Soviet people, all men of culture everywhere in the world will then be in possession of this priceless treasure of Turkmenian literature that was born of the sufferings and the courage of our people, and of their love for freedom.

Perhaps Velmurat-aga will then re-read the book himself, with even keener interest and deeper understanding. Who knows, he may even offer me the ancient manuscript he kept safe for so many years at the bottom of his saddle-bag. A wonderful manuscript! For contained in it are the inspired poems that laid the foundation of Turkmenian classical literature—the poems of Mahtum Kuli.

Translated by Asya Shoyett

Illustrated by Eugeni Golyakhovsky



PAGES FROM THE PAST

DURING Lenin's lifetime the territories of the different nationalities of Soviet Central Asia—the Kirghiz, Kazakhs, Uzbeks, Tadjiks, Turkmen, Kara-Kalpaks, and other ethnic groups—had not yet been re-adjusted. In the early days of Soviet power, the area was divided into the Turgai Territory, Turkestan and Kirghiz Autonomous Republics, and the Khorezm and Bukhara Soviet Peoples' Republics. The present pattern of Union and Autonomous republics was completed after Lenin's death. Lenin's directives to the Communists of Turkestan and Central Asia were valid for all the peoples of the Soviet East because they were expressive of the Communist Party's national policy.

On November 20, 1917, less than a month after the Revolution, Lenin presided over a meeting of the Council of People's Commissars at which the famous *Appeal to the Toiling Moslems of Russia and the East* was adopted. It was addressed to the Tatar population of the Volga provinces and the Crimea, the Kirghiz, Kazakh, and Uzbek population of Central Asia, the Azerbaidjanians, the Chechens and other nationalities of the Caucasus—to all whose “mosques and shrines were desecrated and religion and customs suppressed by the Russian tsars.” The Appeal declared: “Henceforth your religion and customs, your national and cultural institutions, shall enjoy full freedom and immunity. You are free to shape your national life as you see fit. That is your right and, like the rights of all the peoples of Russia, it is guaranteed by the Revolution and protected by its organs, the Soviets of Worker, Soldier, and Peasant Deputies.”

The following letter which Lenin addressed to Lunacharsky in connection with the handing over to the Moslem community of one of the oldest Iraqi manuscripts dating back approximately to the end of the 7th or beginning of the 8th centuries and known as the Osman Koran is indicative of Soviet policy towards the Moslem peoples:

Petrograd, December 9, 1917.

To Anatoli Vasilyevich Lunacharsky,
People's Commissar of Education

The Petrograd Region Moslem Congress has voted to ask the Council of People's Commissars, in deference to the wishes of all Russian Moslems, that the ‘Holy Osman Koran,’ now in the State Public Library, be turned over to the Moslem community.

The Congress entrusted fulfilment of this decision to its Chairman, Usman Gidayatulloch Tokumbetov, who is also Vice-Chairman of the All-Russian Moslem Military Council, and Kerim Mukhamedshich Sagidov, a member of the Moslem National Parliament.

The Council of People's Commissars has decided that the 'Holy Osman Koran' be immediately handed over to the Regional Moslem Congress and requests you to issue the necessary instructions.

V. Ulyanov (Lenin), Chairman,
Council of People's Commissars,
V. Bonch-Bruyevich, Executive Secretary,
N. Gorbunov, Secretary.

The story of how the Petrograd Public Library acquired the famous Osman Koran is typical of tsarism's colonialist policy.

The manuscript was discovered in the Khodja-Ahrara Mosque in Samarkand soon after the Russians had taken the city from Bukhara in 1868. The Governor-General of Turkestan, "General-Adjutant Von Kaufmann I" (that was the title he assumed) purchased it—for 100 roubles!—and presented it to the St. Petersburg Imperial Library. The library became an object of pilgrimage. Moslems came from all parts of the world to see it, for the Osman Koran is one of the most revered documents of Islam. In fact, after the February Revolution of 1917, Moslem soldiers of the Preobrazhensky Regiment tried to seize it and were repelled by troops sent by the Provisional Government. The Soviet power immediately returned the document to the Moslems.

It was generally believed that the manuscript had belonged to the Caliph Osman (644-656) who, the legend goes, was assassinated while reading it. Careful study of the manuscript and related sources, however, led Russian 19th-century scholars to conclude that it was far more likely that the Osman Koran had been part of Tamerlane's famous library and was probably brought to Samarkand, the capital of his empire, after the capture of Bagdad in 1393. It remained in Samarkand, securely chained to a marble column in the mosque and was read and re-read by many generations of islamic students.

Immediately after the October Revolution, Moslem leaders petitioned the Soviet government for its return to the Moslem community. On December 1, 1917, the Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Moslem Council, Akhmed Tsalikov, applied to the People's Commissar of Nationalities requesting the "return of the confiscated Osman Koran now in the Hermitage." J. V. Stalin replied on behalf of the Council of People's Commissars that "this national treasure would be formally restored to the Moslems," and that he would get in touch with A. V. Lunacharsky, the People's Commissar of Education who was in charge of the Hermitage, on the subject.

However it was learned that the Koran was not in the Hermitage whose valuable artistic and scientific collections had been evacuated to Moscow, but in the Petrograd Public Library. The Petrograd Region Moslem Congress passed this resolution which it forwarded to the People's Commissariat of Nationalities:

"The Osman Koran, the sacred property of the entire Islamic world is at present in the State Public Library. Sacred Moslem treasures should be the property of Moslems. That is the wish of all Russian Moslems, and the Petrograd region Moslem Congress therefore unanimously resolves:

"1. That the Holy Osman Koran be immediately placed in Moslem custody;

"2. That the Holy Osman Koran be transferred to the Region Congress which in turn shall transfer it to the National Moslem Parliament of Inner Russia and Siberia, now assembled in the city of Ufa."

On December 6, Lenin issued instructions that the Osman Koran be handed over to the Moslem Community. At the same time, Lenin ordered that the famous Subeki Tower in Kazan and another ancient monument of Islamic architecture, the Caravansarai in Ufa, be placed at the disposal of the Moslem community.

In accordance with Lenin's instructions, the Osman Koran was duly handed over to Moslem representatives, and brought to Ufa and subsequently sent to Tashkent. It was thus returned to Uzbekistan, from where it had been removed by the tsar's satraps in 1869.

On December 14, 1917, Lenin approved the appointment of Alibei Jangildin as Provisional Commissar of Turgai Region (now the Kazakh republic) and instructed all local authorities to assist him in "defending the interests of the toiling masses of the Kirghizes," as the Kazakhs were then called.

Alibei Jangildin (1881-1953) was one of the first Kazakh Communists, having joined the Party in 1915 and, a year later, with Amangeldy Imanov, led the Kazakh revolt against the tsarist government.

On April 3, 1918, Jangildin presided over the Congress of Soviets of the Turgai Region in Orenburg and was elected Chairman of the Regional Executive Committee. In a message to Lenin, the Congress pledged itself "to defend the gains of the Revolution under the guidance of the Soviet government which alone can give the tormented toiling people of all nations and races freedom, fraternity, peace, and prosperity."

On April 22, 1918, in a telegram to the Congress of Soviets at Tashkent, Lenin declared that the Council of People's Commissars supported autonomy for Turkestan and was confident that Soviet power would take firm root in every part of the area. A year later, at the Eighth Party Congress, Lenin discussed the Party's attitudes "in relation to such nationalities as the Kirghizes, Uzbeks, Tadzhiks, Turkmens." On May 17, 1918, Lenin signed a decree allocating fifty million roubles for irrigation development in Turkestan. On October 8, 1919, on Lenin's initiative, a commission on Turkestan was appointed by the Central Executive Committee and Council of People's Commissars. Its chief object, Lenin emphasized, was to build up a close alliance between the working people of Russia and the peoples of Turkestan, and assure their self-determination and elimination of every variety of national inequality and discrimination. That, Lenin declared, was the "foundation of the Russian Soviet government's policy." On November 22, 1919, Lenin addressed the Second All-Russian Congress of

Communist Organizations of the Peoples of the East, and somewhat earlier wrote his famous letter to the Communists of Turkestan, addressing them "not as Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars and the Council of Defence, but as a member of the Party." He appealed to the Russian Communists in Turkestan "to exert every effort to set an effective example of comradely relations with the peoples of Turkestan, to demonstrate to them by your actions that we are sincere in our desire to root out all traces of Great-Russian imperialism and wage an implacable struggle against world imperialism."

Lenin explained that for the Russian Soviet Republic, the establishment of correct relationships with the peoples of Turkestan was of epochal importance, and that Russia's attitude was of very practical significance for the whole of Asia and for all the colonies of the world, for thousands of millions of people.

And Lenin pointed to the example of Turkestan in his theses on the national and colonial question.

On June 13, 1920, Lenin advanced a series of practical proposals designed to give the toiling peasants of Turkestan a bigger share in the affairs of government. He also recommended to draw up an ethnographic map of Turkestan subdividing it into Uzbekistan, Kirghizia and Turkmenistan and to carry out a detailed study of the question whether these three parts should be united or separated.

In later years five Union republics, Uzbekistan, Kirghizia, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan and Tadjikistan were formed on this territory.

On August 7, 1921, Lenin wrote to the Turkestan Bureau of the Party Central Committee on the need to display systematic and maximum concern for the Moslem poor, their organization and enlightenment. "This policy can and should be elaborated and *consolidated* (in a series of *precisely formulated* directives). It should serve as a model for the *whole* of the East."

"We know that the popular masses of the East will rise as independent actors, as builders of a new life, because hundreds of millions of people in the East belong to dependent, oppressed nations, which until now were objects of international imperialist policy. . . . The period of awakening of the East in the contemporary revolution is being succeeded by a period in which all the Eastern peoples will participate in deciding the destiny of the whole world, so as not to be simply an object of enrichment of others."

(From Lenin's report at the Second All-Russian Congress of Communist Organizations of the Peoples of the East, in November, 1919.)

Pyotr. SKOSYREV

NOTES ON TURKMENIAN LITERATURE

(From a Writer's Notebook)

THE first thing that strikes the newcomer to Turkmenia is the vast expanses of barren land, covered with sand or salt resembling snow. And when, after weary miles of nothing but sand, a green oasis appears in the distance, the traveller heaves a sigh of relief. A short distance along this irrigation ditch, he thinks, will surely bring one to the real Turkmenia. These sand dunes, brownish rocks, and prickly bushes round dreary-looking station buildings, lost in the monotonous clayey emptiness, must be a prelude.

Vain expectations. The oasis usually ends as suddenly as it begins. No sooner does the road reach the shade of orchards and fences than it turns once or twice, passes the village square, skirts fields thickly covered with cotton plants and is back in the desert again where the unaccustomed eye finds nothing to fasten on, nowhere to rest its gaze.

Though it is the southernmost republic of the U.S.S.R., Turkmenia has nothing of the luxuriant scenery of subtropical lands. At first glance it appears to be poor and barren, particularly to one who knows the brilliance of the Caucasian and Crimean landscapes. The stranger will be mistaken, however, if he takes the sparsity of the landscape for meagreness, let alone sterility, of the Turkmenian soil. Turkmenia has a beauty of its own, and the fruits of its soil are rich and varied. The observant visitor will discover that beauty and wealth.

He will find inimitable charm in beautiful torrid streets of Ashkhabad, in the cotton plantations of the ancient Murgab Valley, once an arena for the armies of Alexander the Great, and in the felt tents of nomad camps in the heart of the Kara Kum desert.

A country derives its distinctive character from various specific features of scenery and climate, of mineral wealth, soil, history, economics, and architecture, of the customs and way of life of its inhabitants.

The beauty of every land is primarily the beauty of the people who work on it.

The present territory of the Turkmenian republic was inhabited many centuries ago by nomadic tribes of cattle-herders and warriors, the Turkmen. These

Turkestan

The Turkmenian republic is a major producer of fine-fibred cotton. The output in 1956 alone was sufficient for the manufacture of 150,000,000 metres of voile, cambric, taffeta and other high-grade cloths, while all the cotton produced in Turkmenia that year was sufficient for the manufacture of 800,000,000 metres of cloth.

Before the Revolution there were 58 schools in Turkmenia—"schools" at which boys were taught religious texts in Arabic by mullahs in classes usually held in a dark shed or out in the open, without desks or school equipment. Now the republic has 1,200 schools attended by more than 225,000 boys and girls.

Not a single Turkmenian woman could read or write before the Revolution. Today there is a special pedagogical institute for women in the town of Mary and hundreds of Turkmenian girls attend higher and specialized secondary schools in the republic. Whereas by 1940 the number of pupils in seven-year and secondary schools throughout the U.S.S.R. had increased four-fold as compared with 1914, in the Turkmenian S.S.R. the corresponding increase was 34-fold. Urban music schools in Turkmenia have an

tribes adapted themselves to the terrain and fiercely defended their tribal territories against encroachment by their neighbours. Their history was one of strife and struggle—struggle not only against foreign enemies but also between tribes and clans, struggle for wells, for better pasture-lands, for the fertile lands of the river valleys and the rich grass-lands of the plateaus.

Until 1917 the Turkmenians had neither national unity nor political independence. Only the October Revolution brought the scattered tribes unity and independent statehood.

The Revolution greatly changed the lives of the Turkmenian people. The persevering and enthusiastic efforts of Soviet men and women have brought life to the Kara Kum desert which now feeds huge herds, and to the arid, saline land, now dotted with derricks humming in the wind on the inexhaustible oil fields of Nebit-Dag, and to the shores of the once-dead gulf of Karabugaz, and to the Caspian Sea, and to the slopes of the Kopet-Dag and Kugitan Mountains.

For hundreds of years the lot of the Turkmenian people had been a hard one. Dreams of a better life were the theme of song and legend, but they were unattainable, until forty years ago, a new era arrived and made the dreams of all the oppressed peoples of former tsarist Russia come true.

2

This transformation of dreams into reality is the theme of *The Decisive Step*¹, by the distinguished Turkmenian writer Berdy Kerbabayev.

The style of this novel is in many respects akin to the soil from which the author sprang. It is simple, laconic and restrained. There is no trace of affectation in either plot or narration. To the superficial eye, in fact, the writer's palette may seem lacking in lustre, just as the colours of a Turkmenian rug—one of the miracles of folk art—may look dull, at first glance. Calmly,

¹Published in *Soviet Literature*, No. 11, 1948.

without raising his voice, without revealing either emotion or, it would seem, his attitude to events and persons portrayed, the author tells the story of vital developments in the life of the Turkmenian people.

How the October Revolution came to Turkmenia is the basic theme of *The Decisive Step*.

Artyk, a young peasant, and Aina, the beautiful daughter of a poor man like himself, are in love. They have little chance of happiness, however, for Halnazar, a rich peasant, has made up his mind to make Aina the bride of his dull-witted son Bally. It seems that there is no way out, that Aina will soon become Halnazar's daughter-in-law and will spend her life grieving for Artyk and her unfulfilled dream of happiness.

Events take an unexpected turn, however. In Russia major political developments are coming to a head. The war with Germany is dragging on. Revolution is approaching. The destinies of Artyk and Aina become part of the destiny of the whole people.

Artyk meets Ivan Chernyshov, a Russian railway worker and a Bolshevik, and takes part in the Central-Asian uprising of 1916. This premature and unorganized revolt against tsarist colonial policy fails. Artyk, along with others, is arrested and imprisoned. The overthrow of the tsar by the workers of Moscow and Petrograd brings Artyk his freedom. Revolution comes to the sandy wastes of Turkmenia.

That is the substance of the first volume of Kerbabayev's novel.

In the next volume the reader finds Ivan Chernyshov chairman of the Soviet of working-people's deputies and Artyk in a *basmachi*¹ detachment led by Eziz, a man by whose side he fought in the 1916 uprising. Artyk has been misled by Eziz's reputation as a militant enemy of the tsarist colonizers. Actually Eziz, whom Artyk believes to be a champion of popular freedom, cares nothing for the people. He is a typical adventurer and bandit.

enrolment of over 1,000 boys and girls.

Before the Revolution there was not a single higher or specialized secondary school on the territory of Turkmenia. Now the republic has a state university, three pedagogical colleges, an agricultural and a medical institute, 33 specialized technical schools. The total enrolment is 27,000.

The Turkmenian republic has an Academy of Sciences with institutes of physics and geophysics, chemistry, anti-seismic construction, geology, linguistics and literature, economics, history, archeology and ethnography, botany, zoology and parasitology. There are about 1,300 researchers in different branches of science in Turkmenia.

Before the Revolution there were no newspapers or books published in the Turkmenian language. Now 65 newspapers, 31 magazines and other periodicals appear in the Turkmenian republic. As many as 400 books in editions totalling 3,500,000 copies are published annually. Between 1950 and 1955 the population of Turkmenia spent over 70,000,000 roubles on books. Before the Revolution only seven per thousand of the population were literate.

¹ *basmachi* — nationalist bandits in Central Asia

Only long and painful experience finally shows Artyk what kind of a man Eziz really is. When at last he discovers, however, that Eziz's talk about the grandeur and freedom of the Turkmenian people is hypocritical and false, Artyk definitely throws in his lot with the Revolution. With a squad of horsemen who are loyal to him, he leaves Eziz and joins the Bolsheviks.

On finishing the novel the reader feels as if he were parting from dear friends. Not only has he become fond of Artyk, Chernyshov, Aina and the other heroes of the book, but he sympathizes with their dreams of a better life for all and their struggle to make that dream come true. Kerbabayev's novel broadens the concept of the Soviet motherland and at the same time brings out the specific features and the richness of Turkmenia's history and culture. The author succeeds in interesting the reader in Turkmenia, and does this without visible effort. He does not sing the praises of Turkmenia's natural scenery, the beauty of Turkmenia's women, the bravery and prowess of Turkmenia's men; he avoids flowery metaphor. He achieves forcefulness through power of realistic portrayal.

To achieve such realism an artist must know and love his people and understand the paths they have taken to freedom and happiness.

The Decisive Step is a major contribution to all Soviet literature as well as to the Turkmenian literature. It owes its success—it has been published in many languages, in approximately one million copies—to the grandeur of its theme, to its interesting subject-matter, to its skilful portrayal of a multitude of vivid characters, linked by complex relationships, to the dramatic power of the episodes and to the richness of the language.

This does not mean that the novel has no shortcomings. Not all the characters are equally well drawn; some are a mere outline. Some of the dialogue is too long. Certain episodes and scenes resemble fictionalized reportage.

These shortcomings, however, do not overshadow the value of the book. Kerbabayev's style profoundly expresses the national traits of the Turkmenian people, the specific character of their way of life. It embodies the elements of Turkmenian national form in the contemporary realistic novel.

3

One of the concluding chapters of the novel gives an account of a conversation between Artyk and Ivan Chernyshov. The two men are standing on the bank of the Amu Darya, watching the rout of Whiteguard troops near the town of Char-dzhou. "I wonder," Artyk says, gazing at the broad and deep river flowing between barren banks, "whether there is any power on earth that can divert the Amu Darya into the desert and give life to Turkmenia's parched soil. . . ." "There is such a power," Ivan Chernyshov replies, "the people, led by the Bolsheviks!"

Artyk trusts Chernyshov and he would like to believe him now, but he can not help feeling doubtful. Would the Bolsheviks cope with the Amu Darya?

Kerbabayev concludes his novel with Artyk's dream of the Amu Darya water

ing the desert. After finishing the story of the Civil War the novelist turns to the theme of the irrigation of the desert—a worthy sequence to the theme of social changes in the land of sand.

Artyk's dream was the age-old dream of the Turkmenian people. To turn the course of the Amu Darya so that it flowed through the waterless desert had always seemed a beautiful fairy-tale, a pleasant dream, but futile and, like all fairy-tales, outside the realm of reality. Ivan Chernyshov, however, was right. The Bolsheviks have undertaken to do the impossible. Among the major projects of the immediate future is the Great Kara Kum Canal which will make reality of the dream that has lived in the hearts and songs of the Turkmenians for hundreds of years.

Lack of water has always been the Turkmenian people's most formidable enemy. The Kara Kum desert forms the entire central part of Turkmenia. As much as 93 per cent of the republic's territory is uninhabited. The mighty Amu Darya irrigates only 200,000 hectares of the Turkmenian land whereas it could irrigate at least two million. When part of the Amu Darya waters is channelled into the desert the Turkmenian republic will be transformed.

Projects for bringing water to the Turkmenian desert were advanced as early as the 18th century, during the reign of Peter the Great. Several such projects were devised in the 19th century too. But all of them remained on paper. The tsarist government had neither the trained personnel, the funds, nor the genuine desire to carry out a project of such magnitude. Only when the Bolsheviks came to power did the diversion of this large Central-Asian river become feasible.

When the Great Kara Kum Canal, which will be more than 800 kilometres long, is completed Turkmenia will have twice as much arable land. Truly a socialist method of acquiring new lands! Not by the oppression or plunder of neighbouring states but by the conquest of Nature!

In addition to irrigating large tracts of arid land, the Canal will form a new waterway, linking the southernmost regions of the republic with its central oasis—the Murgab Valley and the foothills of the Kopet-Dag Mountains. Ships will ply the new waterway, carrying grain, cotton, building materials, fruit, textiles, mineral fertilizer, caracul skins, Sarajin mutton, glassware from Ashkhabad factories, books and magazines put out by Turkmenian publishing houses.

Graceful poplars and spreading mulberry-trees will line the banks of the canal. Where soil conditions on the newly irrigated land are unsuitable for cotton cultivation, fruit trees—apricots, pears, plums—will bend under heavily laden branches. The new cotton plantations, abundantly watered by the Amu Darya, will yield not only long white-fibred plants but also brown, green, and blue-fibred plants which will not require artificial dyes. And the new cotton will be woven into cloth in newly erected mills, perhaps in Bairam-Ali, perhaps in Mary, or in Artyk's native village Tedjen. The new Kara Kum giant will rival and outstrip the present textile mill in Ashkhabad.

Kara Kum collective farms will begin to cultivate sugar cane, an exotic crop for which the climatic and soil conditions of southern Kara Kum are suitable.

When the *aryks* of Ashkhabad are brimful of water channelled from the Amu Darya—which will be within a year or two—the city will change beyond recognition. Its streets will be filled with the fragrance of all kinds of flowers, for there will be none that cannot bloom in Ashkhabad.

All this will come. But it will not come of itself. It will be brought about by the endeavour of thousands of Soviet men and women. And as these breath-taking projects materialize, others will be born. For one victory engenders another. One discovery leads to another, even more wonderful.

The dream Artyk voiced many years ago, as he stood on the bank of the Amu Darya with Ivan Chernyshov, is now being turned into reality by Soviet people.

4

The Decisive Step is not Kerbabayev's first book. Berdy Kerbabayev belongs to the older generation of Turkmenian writers. Of middle-peasant origin, he received an education in pre-Revolution times—a rare opportunity for a Turkmenian in those days. For every literate Turkmenian there were 150 to 170 illiterates. Kerbabayev attended a Moslem primary school in his village and then went to Bukhara to continue his studies at the madrasah. There he showed a keen interest in the great Eastern poets such as Nevai, Omar Khayyam and Jami, and made a special study of the classics of his own people. Today Berdy Kerbabayev is regarded as one of the foremost scholars of the great 18th-century Turkmenian poet Makhtumkuli, an edition of whose verse he prepared for press in 1926. Until then the poems of this remarkable philosopher-poet were available only in manuscript form. The preparation of Makhtumkuli's works for publication required extensive literary research and in this respect Kerbabayev's post-Revolution studies at Leningrad University, where he attended a Turkmenian seminar in the Oriental Department, stood him in good stead.

Berdy Kerbabayev is regarded as the founder of the majority of literary forms in contemporary Turkmenian literature.

Woman's World, a poem about the hard lot of the Turkmenian women before the Revolution, published in 1927, and Kerbabayev's earliest notable success, was the first realistic production of Turkmenian poetry. In the following twenty years of indefatigable work Kerbabayev many times put his signature to works which have been the *first* in the history of the new Soviet Turkmenian culture. He wrote the *first* Turkmenian novel, the *first* Turkmenian scenario, the *first* Turkmenian historical tragedy, and the *first* modern poem. *The Decisive Step* is the first Turkmenian historical novel, a truly epic work portraying the destinies of a people at an important turning point in their history.

Kerbabayev has written over 30 books, among them *Ailar*, a novel in verse about the participation of Turkmenians in the last war; *The Recruit*, a book of short stories; *Hakykai* and *Batyr*, stories; *Kurban-Durdy*, a story and a scenario about a Turkmenian war hero; several poems, several books for children and a large number of plays, many of which are running in Turkmenian theatres. His



More Cotton for the People (A poster)

Sadykh Sade (Azerbaijan S.S.R.)



Portrait of a Turkmenian Woman

Evgenia Adamova (Turkmenian S.S.R.)

post-war books include *Aisoltan from the Land of White Gold*¹ a story, *Mysterious Mountain*, a poem, and *Nebit-Dag*, a novel about the life and work of Turkmenia's technical specialists.

All these works, so diverse in form and artistic approach, disclose the amazing versatility of their author, whose reputation as one of the most distinguished writers of our multinational literature is more than justified.

Kerbabayev has translated *Mother* by Gorky, a number of stories by Leo Tolstoy, and Sholokhov's *And Quiet Flows the Don* into Turkmenian. He also translated the libretto for Chaikovsky's opera *Evgeni Onegin*, produced by the Ashkhabad Theatre of Opera and Ballet in 1946.

Kerbabayev's contribution to the Soviet literature of Turkmenia is comparable to that of Sabit Mukanov and Mukhtar Auezov to Soviet Kazakh literature, of Sadriddin Aini to Tadjik literature, and of Andrejs Upits and Vilis Lacis to Soviet Latvian literature.

Striking talent, a keen interest in the literary heritage of his native land and, above all, a deep love for the people are the qualities that have made Kerbabayev successful. The underlying theme of all Kerbabayev's work is the destinies of the Turkmenian people. His principal hero is the Turkmenian people. Kerbabayev may be called a portrayer of the manners and customs of the Turkmenian people.

5

Re-invigorated by the Revolution, the Turkmenian people have advanced many gifted writers besides Kerbabayev from among their midst. The prose writer Ata Kaushutov and the poets Aman Kekilov and Chary Ashirov, for instance, are among the best known.

Ata Kaushutov's novel *Mekhri and Vepa*, published in 1946, still bears the imprint of the oral folklore poetic tradition. Critics called attention to the excessive use of the conventional in the narrative and pointed out that some of the episodes seem fantastic against the general realistic background of the story. The author paid heed to this criticism, as can be seen from his next novel *On the Slopes of Kopet-Dag*. This story about a post-war Turkmenian village is more realistic and reveals a first-hand knowledge of the subject.

Kaushutov has been most successful, however, in his stories about the past. For richness and originality of style, vivid character delineation, as in *The Last Elder*, and graphic presentation of life in the pre-Revolution village, his stories rank with the finest productions of Turkmenian prose.

Among post-war poems, the best known are Aman Kekilov's *Love* and Chary Ashirov's *The End of the Feud*. In his reproduction of scenes from contemporary Turkmenian life Aman Kekilov has made a bold attempt to utilize the experience of the classic Russian novel in verse. He has not yet completed his work. Of the three volumes he has planned, only the first has appeared in book form,

¹Published in *Soviet Literature*, No. 12, 1950.

while several chapters of the second have appeared in periodicals. Although it is still premature to judge whether he has succeeded in his aim, it is already clear that his poem is a significant one. Kekilov has given a fine portrayal of a typical representative of the young Soviet intelligentsia of Turkmenia, a man with broad horizons and erudition. His hero Akmurad Ashirov, a graduate of Moscow University, avidly absorbs the best in Russian and West-European science and art, for he realizes that without a knowledge of Pushkin, Shakespeare and Dante, and of his great contemporaries he will not, on his return to his native Ashkhabad, be able to contribute actively to the development of a Turkmenian national Soviet culture. The author strives to present relationships between his characters in terms of reality and the contemporary spirit, instead of in terms of conventional poetic usage. In his lyrical digressions and in the monologues of the characters, he asserts the necessity of discarding obsolete forms in art and in life if they hinder the victory of the new that socialism has engendered.

It should be emphasized, however, that while he calls for the re-invigoration and enrichment of national forms of culture, Kekilov by no means breaks with the national tradition. He employs that tradition creatively, making it serve present-day aims.

Chary Ashirov, who is of the same generation as Aman Kekilov, started out as a translator. Among his translations into the Turkmenian are Krylov's fables and poems by Lermontov and Mayakovsky. His most important achievement in this field, however, is the complete translation of Nekrasov's *Grandpa Frost* and *Who Finds Life Sweet in Russia*. Perhaps that is why *The End of the Feud* often brings to mind the great 19th-century Russian democratic poet. The theme of Ashirov's poem, too, brings Nekrasov to mind. It is a moving story of the awakening of an uneducated peasant, stupefied by the senselessness of life in the pre-Revolution village and a slave to obsolete conventions. It is the story of a man who dares to swim against the current.

The struggle between the new and the old in the minds and customs of the Turkmenian peasant is one of Ashirov's favourite topics. Besides writing poems, he has collaborated with the Russian writer Dmitri Zotov in several prose works on this theme.

Turkmenian literature has developed from a folklore literature into a modern and varied realistic literature that is now entering its maturity.

6

As ill luck would have it, the small force of Turkmenian writers has suffered heavy losses in the last ten or fifteen years. The gifted poets Shali Kekilov, Ata Niyazov and Amandurdy Alamyshv, and the well-known story-writer Nurmurad Sarykhanov were killed in the war. The Ashkhabad earthquake in 1948, which was a national tragedy, took the lives of a number of gifted writers, among them: Kemal Ishanov, poet and prose writer; Hodzha Ismailov, a promising young writer whose story *The Obstinate One* is to be found on the bookshelves of children's libraries all over the Soviet Union and also in the People's

Democracies; the poet Victor Permyakov, whose translations of Turkmenian verse into Russian helped bring Turkmenian literature on to the country-wide arena.

Despite these losses, however, Turkmenian literature has made gigantic strides in the past forty years. There are hundreds of original Turkmenian works on the shelves of the republic's 2,000 libraries—novels, short stories, poems, songs, literary studies and essays.

Take the picture of Turkmenia at the beginning of the present century—a sun-drenched land with nomad camps scattered sparsely over the vast desert; mountain villages resembling groups of ant-hills; men and women in robes, listening to songs as they rest in their felt tents after a meagre repast; people who regard news of the outside world as they would a fairy-tale. Somewhere, far beyond the sands, trains pass by, following the narrow path of Akhala. The engine whistle breaks into village life like a trumpet sounding from another planet.

That was no more than four decades ago. Turkmenia was illiterate. Today the Turkmenian Academy of Sciences has 17 research institutions. Turkmenia was a pastoral country. Today several socialist towns have risen up in the sands of Kara Kum—Nebit-Dag, Kum-Dag, Cheleken. The terrible destruction of Ashkhabad caused by the earthquake has been repaired. The city has been rebuilt with broad avenues and handsome buildings.

All these stages in the people's life are reflected in Turkmenian literature. The heroic years of the Civil War are described in *The Decisive Step*, *The End of the Feud*, in the verses and tales of Durda Klych, Ata-Salykh and many others. The early years of Soviet power with their hardships and enemy intrigues and the emergence of noble traits of character, lofty emotions and strength of will among the people are the theme of poems by Amandurdy Alamyshiev, Ata Niyazov, Hoja Shukurov, Rakhmet Seidov, Pomma Nurberdiyev, and Shali Kekilov, of stories by Nurmurad Sarykhanov, Kemal Ishanov, Beki Seitakov, and Ata Kaushutov; of plays by Alty Karliyev and Bazar Amanov. The reader is deeply moved by stories about the heroism of Soviet soldiers in the late war and about the tremendous scope of post-war construction (Kaushutov, Seitliyev, Mukhtarov, Kerbabayev, Ismailov, Aman Kekilov, Seitakov, Seidov, and others). A keen interest in foreign life and in significant historical events in foreign countries is to be observed in Turkmenian literature too (a play by Burunov, a novel by Klychev, and a poem by Seitliyev).

While not all Turkmenian literary productions are equally well written, they have in common their kinship with the people. These books were not written by bored aesthetes, indifferent to the people's fate nor by idle collectors of poetic flowers of speech. They were written by true sons of the people and ardent patriots.

The emergence of so rich a literature among a people who were illiterate nomads only yesterday is indeed a miracle. But the heroic achievements of the Soviet people is an even greater miracle, and this miracle has not been sufficiently reflected in Turkmenian literature, as it has not in the rest of our literature. Turkmenian writers must work still harder to accomplish the gigantic tasks history has set all Soviet writers.

A POET OF A REJUVENATED LAND

*All poetry
is a journey
into the unknown!*



Mirzo Tursun-zade

I want to preface my sketch about Mirzo Tursun-zade, the Tadjik poet, with these lines of Mayakovsky, which have long been an aphorism. When Mayakovsky said "the unknown," he evidently meant that poets are always discoverers, capable of discerning the fresh in the old, the extraordinary in the humdrum. To the readers of Tursun-zade, including those who have visited his native Central-Asian country of Tadjikistan, Tursun-zade's verse will inevitably bring a sensation of learning something new, a sensation of discovering a new angle of life, the light of a newly created poetical image.

Is it not rather strange, to use the words "newly created" when referring to a poet of an ancient country possessing a poetry as ancient as the mausoleum of Tamerlane? For oriental poetry has developed its own traditional forms, which have been handed down the ages from bard to bard, just as a carpet design is handed down from generation to generation. What, then, is this unknown which this poet of ancient Tadjikistan has discovered for us?

The answer lies in the difference between what his native Tadjikistan used to be, and what it is today; how the new life has triumphed over former Asiatic backwardness, how feudal antiquity has retreated before the youthfulness of socialism. Tursun-zade is a poet of new Tadjikistan, of a land garbed in the white garments of cotton fields, of a land intersected by blue ribbons of irrigation canals and highways reaching out to the very peaks of the Pamirs. Tursun-zade is a bard of a country whose women have cast the horse-hair veils off their delicate faces, where bright, tall dwelling houses are constantly displacing clay huts and where, for the first time in Tadjikistan's history, her sons and daughters are storming the heights of knowledge in universities and academies.

Recently, a conference of cotton growers was held in the Kremlin: the peasants of the republics of the Soviet East had sent their delegates to Moscow from their villages to discuss, at the highest levels, the results and plans of their work. Lack of space prevents me from describing these people—for it is they who are

the first readers of the works of such poets of our East as Tursun-zade. For them, he translates the everyday life of their country into the language of the extraordinary, and for those who have never been there, he transforms the unknown into the known.

Reading Mirzo Tursun-zade's poems, we enter a world of miraculous, yet realistic transformations. Cracked and barren fields become fertile and well-irrigated plantations. Dusty, clay-hut towns turn into comfortable, well-planned cities. Antiquated agricultural implements emerge as the last word in engineering. The tractor replaces the primitive *ketmen* (hoe). But, what is most important, are the transformations of the people themselves. The son of a former slave becomes a poet. Let us follow him to the Hissar Valley (the title of his poem), and let him tell us about himself.

*In former years, when I was still a youth,
I failed to comprehend life's deeper meaning;
And though my sight was clear, my eyes wide open,
I stared at everything with gaze unseeing.*

*My father, poor and old before his time,
Lay panting in his hut and slowly dying—
Of what—but Allah knew; his lamentations
Were like the smoke that rises from the hearth. . . .*

*. . . And often, my poor mother
Would fix her eyes in space, with vacant vision,
And thus she'd stand for hours on end, in stupor*

The past lives again in these terse reminders. Today, the youth of Tadjikistan no longer knows such a torpid life. They have no memory of the days when the Hissar Valley, now a carpet of blooming tulips and verdant grass, was a

Tadjikistan

In 1913 there were 29 small and semi-handicraft enterprises employing a total of 240 workers on the territory of what is now the Tadjik republic. About 300 up-to-date industrial enterprises have been established in Tadjikistan in Soviet times.

The capital of the republic, Stalinabad, is a beautiful, well-planned city, rich in verdure, with a population of 200,000. Only 35 years ago there were three small villages on its site, the largest of which, Dyushambe, had a population of 600. In 1956 the Tadjik republic had 14 towns and 31 urban settlements.

stern and forbidding desert. Tursun-zade has created a poetical image of the transformation of a former poverty-stricken and squalid existence into a life of beauty and joy, in which the tulips and grass, the wells and springs, and the deep azure skies of Hissar Valley now belong to all the people.

His verse is full of images of the past, constantly relieved by images of the new. And, for the Tadjik, the central image of the new world is the clear, long-awaited, generous, life-giving *water*. For on this water, once the exclusive property of the feudal bais, depended the life and happiness of the peasants. It was with streams of this harmless water, so innocent in itself, that the feudal lords of the East used to murder, ruin, and grow rich. Today, the Tadjiks are the masters of their water, which now flows from the main canal along countless *aryks*.

*Their fields are wide as any lord's today,
And Nature now no water them refuses.
The Grand Hissar Canal has swept away
Grief's memories for ever and for aye.*

Here, water is the symbol of that vital new life flowing in thousands of streams along the ancient soil, now resuscitated and rejuvenated.

It is typical of Tursun-zade that these verses which I have quoted are by no means *kasydas* or *gazels*. Nor is this accidental—his poetry approaches in harmony to that of progressive world poetry which is bound up with the names of Mayakovsky, Neruda, Hikmet, Eluard, Nezval. . . . Here, Tursun-zade does not stand alone. The poetry of all the Soviet Eastern republics is departing more and more from national narrowness and seclusion. This is a new, human poetry which sings the man of labour, peace, and progressive and revolutionary changes in life.

However, Tursun-zade certainly does not abandon any of his national features: he is a Tadjik poet, with one difference: he is a Soviet Tadjik poet. And

Before the Revolution only one in 200 of the Tadjik population was literate. There were three schools throughout the territory with 20 to 30 pupils in each. In 1957 there were 330,000 in the republic's 2,547 schools and over 16,000 in its ten higher schools.

The Tadjik republic has an Academy of Sciences. In this republic, where only forty years ago a literate person was a rarity and the land was tilled in the most primitive manner, agricultural problems alone are studied in three research institutions.

Tabibs—witch doctors—were practically the only source of "medical attention" Tadjiks had before the Revolution. Dirt, ignorance, disease—the plague, small-pox, cholera—were rife. The Revolution changed all this. In 1955 Tadjikistan had 94 times as many qualified doctors and 92 times as much hospital accommodation as in 1913.

this difference is highly important. Without breaking away from the classic, the poet creates a new, national form of Tadjik poetry, adds to it a poetry enriched by contemporaneity, by a progressive revolutionary outlook, the daring of the innovator. From the conventional ornamentive metaphorism and canonized themes, he passes over to a new form of imagery and new poetical forms.

Of Tursun-zade's last works, I particularly like his poems describing his visits to other countries of the East. One of these, *Two Roads*, evokes my comradely envy of his novelty, dynamics, tense images and wide scope of his ideas—to say the least. This is a description of his return home. The aeroplane, soaring over the mountains and deserts, seems to be flying over time itself, over the past. The poet's story is executed in such a convincing sweep, that reading it, you can't help feeling that you are speeding on the back of a jinnee from the Arabian Nights, over the black pillar of the Kaaba.

*And we flew o'er the first and most ancient of roads in creation,
O'er the Garden of Eden we soared, o'er that legend forgotten.*

But sober, realistic thoughts take us back from the Scheherazade's jinnee to real life which we see slipping under our aeroplane's silver wings.

*And I gazed at the heavens, the transparent, snow-covered mountains,
And saw the blood flow in battles for jewels and metals.*

The beauty of the earth and sky, and historical reminiscences failed to dim the poets vision:

*They are trampling on freedom and truth, shame and honour outraging,
For possession of pipelines huge armies in war are engaging,
For the pipelines that, lost in the distance, stretch out without motion,
While the scent of petroleum spreads like a cloud o'er the ocean.*

Ponder over these lines and you will understand that they could have been written only in the air, during a flight—for this is exactly how the pipeline, disappearing in the distance, looks like. Exotic names of deserts and rivers stand out in sharp contrast to such prosaic words as "petroleum," "Standard Oil," "dividends," . . . the poet, for whom, as it were, everything is visible in all its nakedness from the skies, forcefully brands the foreign oppressors.

I remember reading, in an ancient Arabian fairy-tale, about a magic diamond. By turning it round, you could see in its facets foreign countries and events, read the minds of people far away. With every line of Tursun-zade's *Two Roads*, one turns, as it were, such a magic diamond.

The poet is armed with a new vision—the free man's outlook on the world. Tursun-zade's realistic, profound vision enhances the poetry of his verse. Not

only the landscapes of the countries over which he flies are poetic. His very pain and indignation are poetic. Even his hatred of all colonizers is profoundly poetic. The backwardness and medieval darkness still extant in many parts of the Orient arouse his bitter feelings.

Only two pages of verse—and we get such a wealth of new sights, new facts and new knowledge. The poet has extracted everything possible from rhyme and rhythm and words, from their capacity to hold ideas. His dynamic lines are like minutes packed with miles, landscapes, human lives, and lives of nations. He makes us recall the past and understand the present.

Now he leads us to the future:

*It is here, to the new world, that begins the road unbending,
That from burdens relieves us, to our hearts new wings lending.*

We are well acquainted with this road to the future, for we ourselves laid it with unbelievable difficulties and marched along it, sweeping away all barriers.

*'Tis the road of friendship of peoples, th'idea so glorious
Which o'er atomic plans and o'er atom bombs will be victorious.*

At our literary conferences, I have frequently met this swarthy man with handsome oriental eyes. He looks very much like his poetry. Most likely, every real poet always does resemble his poetry—in features or in his life, but he does resemble it; for poetry expresses personality.

I greatly regret that I do not know the Tadjik language and am thus prevented from reading Tursun-zade in the original. Then, perhaps, I would be able to write a better and fuller sketch. Here, I wanted to tell of Mirzo Tursun-zade's main features as a writer, to show our readers at least a few facets of his poetry. But—is it not true that a single facet of a jewel is enough to give an idea of the entire bright crystal—as to which rays and what life it reflects with its brilliant surfaces? . . .

AN EPIC OF A NATION'S LIFE

IT is impossible to discuss Mukhtar Auezov's role in Kazakh literature without some reference to the history of that literature. Auezov the dramatist had no forebears and was in fact the founder of Kazakh drama. But as a prose writer he was able to draw upon tradition. There already existed a number of Kazakh prose works as well as examples of journalistic and publicist writing.

The first Kazakh novel, Spandiar Kubeyev's *Bride-Money*, was published in 1913. This novel, which exposed the barbarism of the feudal-clan system and told of the splendour and courage of the common man, was a landmark in Kazakh culture. It had a great influence upon young writers.

Beimbet Mailin's *Monument of Shuga*, which first appeared in 1915, to this day impresses the reader by the vividness of its character-portrayal, its dramatic tension and its well-balanced composition. It portrays the tragic fate of those Kazakhs who rose up against the harsh, old, stagnant ways of the steppe.

The novels of Sultan-Mahmud Toraigyrov, *Who Is to Blame?* and *The Beauty Kamar*, describing life in a patriarchal *aul*, appeared some years later.

But the real blossoming of Kazakh prose is linked with the names of the Soviet Kazakh writers Saken Seifulin, Ilyas Djansugurov, Sabit Mukanov, Gabit Musrepov and, above all, Mukhtar Auezov, who depicted the many-faceted life of his people—a people who within a historically brief period had traversed the road from feudal patriarchy to socialism.

Addressing the 1955 German Writers' Congress, Auezov said:

"During my lifetime, I, the representative of one of the many peoples of Asia, have seen three social systems: feudalism, capitalism, and socialism. Today, like all the citizens of my country, I am taking part in the building of communism. In some sense, it seems to me, I am a human reference book, whose adolescence and present day is separated by centuries. I reached the middle of the 20th century from not the European but the Asian Middle Ages."

These words could in fact be taken as an epigraph for his work, which reflects changes in the life of Kazakh society, changes that in any other historical situation would have taken whole centuries.

During the years of Soviet government Kazakhstan has changed beyond all recognition. It has become a great industrial and agrarian republic, a country with a highly-developed culture, the country of "virgin land upturned." The people too have changed. Now it is impossible to imagine the isolated, warring clans. A new generation of Kazakhs has come on to the stage of history. But the old generation, which came into the sunlight of today from the darkness of the feudal and patriarchal yesterday, has also acquired qualities born of socialism.

All these fabulous phenomena could not but stir Auezov the artist and son of his times. His themes are: the life and ways of the new generation, the

Kazakhstan

The Kazakh republic is the second largest in the U.S.S.R. (after the R.S.F.S.R.). Its area exceeds the combined areas of Britain, France, Spain, Italy, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and Finland.

Kazakhstan was formerly a backward colony of tsarist Russia. Though it possessed tremendous natural resources, it remained a market for goods manufactured in the central industrial regions and, to some extent, a source of raw materials.

In 1957, as compared with 1913, the Kazakh republic's industrial production increased as follows: metal-working, 1,757 times; chemical, 923 times; anthracite, 383 times; non-ferrous metallurgy, 92 times; oil refining, 46 times. In 1913 there were only 4,200,000 hectares under crops in what is now Kazakhstan; in 1957 there were 27,700,000 hectares.

Before the Revolution only two per hundred of the Kazakh population were literate. The Kazakhs did not have an alphabet. Since the establishment of Soviet government illiteracy has been entirely eliminated in the Kazakh republic. The republic's 9,173 schools are attended by 1,300,000 children and employ a teaching staff of more than 81,000. Its 26 higher and 134 specialized technical schools have an enrolment of more than 100,000 boys and girls. The number of

exposure of the survivals of the past in the minds of men, the inspired labour and the rich spiritual world of the Kazakhs of today.

He is the author of scores of short stories and novels. His *Educated Citizen*, *The Lot of the Defenceless*, *Footprints*, *Shoulder to Shoulder*, *The Steadfast Tribe*, and *Thus Was Born Turkestan* have become part of the treasure-house of Kazakh literature.

Auezov also frequently writes articles dealing with social questions, problems of present-day Soviet literature.

For many years he has been engaged in research into literary history and folklore. He is, for example, the author of a book dealing with Kazakh tales and also of a study of Abai Kunanbayev. Auezov, who is fluent in a number of Turkic languages, has made a close study of the literature of Kirghizia. He is one of our country's greatest authorities on the Kirghiz epic *Manas*.

He has also translated Shakespeare's *Othello* and *Taming of the Shrew*, Gogol's *The Inspector-General*, and Turgenev's *A Nest of the Gentry* into Kazakh.

But it was his novel *Abai* which won him fame throughout the Soviet Union.

The image of the great Kazakh poet, thinker and leader Abai had been with the writer since childhood. The aul in which Mukhtar Auezov was born was not far from that of Kunanbayev's, and the future writer learned to write from the manuscript poems and texts of Abai. Auezov was seven years of age when Abai died.

In Abai Auezov saw the embodiment of all the finest features of the Kazakh people.

This novel, based on the life of the great poet, grew into a four-volume epic. It gives a wide-ranging picture of the life of the Kazakh people during the second half of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century.

The first two parts deal with the youth and early manhood of Abai Kunanbayev—years full of searchings for a way forward in literature, and of struggle for the happiness of the people.

Lydia Ilyina
(Kirghiz S.S.R.)



Shepherd



Illustration to the Kirghiz epos
Manas



Abylkhan Kasteyev (Kazakh S.S.R.)
Young Abai

Romanov Sakhi (Kazakh S.S.R.)
A Boy and Two Bais



In the third part, *The Progress of Abai*, we see him as a leader of public opinion, a thinker, a poet of exceptional power and originality. Finally, the recently-published fourth volume tells of the last decade of the poet's life when, under the influence of the approaching revolutionary storm in Russia, the social contradictions among the peoples of the Kazakh steppes had greatly intensified. As a result, the class struggle had become much sharper and clashes had taken place between the democratic and reactionary elements.

The epic of Mukhtar Auezov has been described as an encyclopedia of Kazakh life. The author depicts the history, customs, and ways of the Kazakh people, their traditions, hopes, and aspirations, their struggle for their future; he paints an impressive picture of the Kazakh steppes. He shows the inhumanity of tsarism which made Russia "a prison of nations." His vivid portrayals of tsarist officials, the unprincipled Losovsky, the self-opinionated local government official Tentekoyaz, the haughty governor-general, and also the corrupt representatives of petty officialdom—reflect a system of rule based on the oppression of those who work. The novel at the same time shows that quite a number of Russian laws were nonetheless more advanced than the harsh law of the steppes, and that they on occasion gave some defence against the unbridled rule of the ancient steppe customs.

Mukhtar Auezov also depicts the ignorance and fanaticism of the feudal *bais*. He paints a vivid picture of social oppression under the old order with its stagnant traditions and the maturing class struggle.

Living as he did in the second half of the 19th century, Abai was not a revolutionary; the circumstances of Kazakh life were far from constituting a revolutionary situation. But he saw the only right road for the Kazakh people—that of the closest possible co-operation with the progressive forces of the whole of Russia.

In the beginning of the novel we read how the 14-year-old Abai, returning to his aul from

technical specialists and scientists in Kazakhstan has grown. As many as 230,000 specialists with higher and secondary education are working in the republic's industrial establishments, agriculture, research institutes, and laboratories.

Soviet Kazakhstan is the birthplace of a new branch of science, astrobotany. Scientists are investigating the vegetation of Mars and the Moon.

The Kazakh Academy of Sciences has forty research institutions with a total staff of 2,300. Since it was founded eleven years ago, it has published about 3,200 thematic works, including over 300 monographs on mathematics, astronomy, chemistry, geology, medicine, energetics, metallurgy, and other subjects. It has contacts with 100 scientific organizations in 35 foreign countries.

There were 98 hospitals on the territory of Kazakhstan before the Revolution. Today there are over 700. The number of doctors in 1913 was 244. In 1955 the number of doctors was 10,000.

There are a large number of women among Kazakhstan's scientists. Among the best known are Kamila Utegenova, Doctor of Medicine, head of a department at the Kazakh Medical Institute, and Professor Nail Bazanova, Doctor of Biology, Chairman of the Kazakh Peace Committee. Both these women are daughters of former nomads.

the Semipalatinsk *madrasah*, witnesses the terrible death of two innocent people, the poor peasant Kodar and his daughter-in-law Kamka. The person responsible for this crime was Abai's father, Kunanbai, who wanted to antagonize two clans and seize their pastures. This sample of his father's cruelty marred all the joy the youngster felt on returning to his native aul. This shock, suffered on the threshold of life, becomes the prologue for the future drama of his life, demanding courage, the ability to struggle, and all his moral strength.

Contact with his people prompted many questions, but provided few answers. New ideas reached him from Russian progressive thought. Significantly, one of his first clashes with his father arose from his love of Russian culture.

Abai waged a courageous struggle against ignorance and obscurantism, against everything that enslaved his people. The main theme of the epic is in fact the growing awareness and spiritual strength of the Kazakh people. Everywhere, in the description of Abai's talks with one of the novel's characters, the political exile Pavlov, in the actions of Abai's son Abish, an officer of the Russian Army—described as the "first leader of the new"—in the way of life and the minds of men, we sense the new thoughts, the embryo of a new outlook, all of which delights young people and alarms the adherents of the old ways. We see the imperceptible but inevitable break-up of the old world and the emergence and growth of the first shoots of the new.

In the last volume the scene shifts from the remote auls with their semi-nomadic way of life to the city with its thriving trade, its mixed population, and its clear-cut class differentiation: the merchants and the industrialists at one extreme, the workers and the semi-indigent artisans and day-labourers at the other. The writer describes how solidarity grows up among those who work. The workers, both Russian and Kazakh, frequently extend the hand of fraternal aid to the oppressed people of the steppes, defending them against their feudal rulers.

Thus, for example, the lovers Darmen and Maken, persecuted by the steppe tyrant Urazbai, get aid from the city workers. Maken has been promised to another, but she loves Darmen who takes her away from her aul. According to the law of the steppe both of them should have been handed over to the Court of Elders. But the lovers flee to the town to seek the help of Abai. On his advice, they appeal to the Russian authorities. The court meets. The active intervention of Abai's son and the notoriety of the case oblige the Russian officials to intervene and protect the lovers from the retribution of the steppe lords. "The Case of the Stolen Bride" is decided in her favour. This of course still further increases his enemies' hatred of Abai.

Abai's ties with the people were close and unbreakable. Representatives of the poor and middle sections of the population appealed to him as their friend and counsellor. The people sought the benefit of his experience and intellect.

In the internecine conflicts artificially fanned by the rulers Abai was always on the side of the injured and the suffering, exposing the arbitrary rule of

the bais. Uncompromising in the face of injustice, he even opposed the leaders of the Tobykty clan, of which he himself was a member.

At the end of the novel the author tells of the tragic fate of Abai, persecuted both by the tsarist authorities and the feudal steppe lords. With sympathy and pain we see how the death of his two favourite sons—Abish and Magash the poet, both gifted young Kazakh intellectuals, for whom he had great hopes—finally broke the heart of this profoundly sensitive man. He died, crushed by these heavy blows.

There is a profound combination of epic and lyrical effects in the scenes in which Abai watches the setting of the sun and, wrapped in deep thought, sums up his life, weighs the significance of his verse and foresees the future of his land, advancing steadily forward to progress. In his song *Now Must I Die and Turn into Dust*, Abai bids his native Kazakhstan farewell.

The epic of Mukhtar Auezov is memorable because of its veracity, the typicality of its characters, and the skill of its psychological portrayal. Its heroes, each representative of some tendency of their times and class, are also rich in individual characteristics. Take, for example, the opponents of Abai, personifying the patriarchal past, such as Takezhan, Zhirenshe, Urazbai, Azimbai. All hate Abai intensely. But their characters and methods are different. Some are haughty, and ill-mannered, capable of blind fanaticism; others are "softer" and more flexible in their cunning. Bitter struggles are waged within this feudal clique, but they invariably unite in the struggle against an enemy as dangerous as Abai.

The organic link between Auezov's language and imagery and with those of the Kazakh folklore tradition is a feature of his epic.

While still a child the writer heard the legends and tales of the Kazakh steppes. And later, a master of his native language, he weaves into the fabric of his epic popular proverbs, sayings, turns of phrase and aphorisms, frequently giving them new tones and new meaning. His style is at the same time profoundly individual, the flow of his language changing from that of a turbulent mountain river to that of a gentle steppe stream.

The intonations in his novel are extremely varied too. The harsh tones of Urazbai, full of malice, alternate with the moving appeal of the girl Maken defending her love. Zhirenshe's involved and cunning speech gives place to the philosophical ponderings of Abai, abounding in rich undertones. The rounded phrases of the mullahs, full of Arabisms, clash with the sarcastic, rough but expressive speech of the ordinary Kazakhs.

Talent, painstaking labour and scientific erudition are all happily blended in Mukhtar Auezov's epic.

THE ANCIENT ARCHITECTURE OF BUKHARA

BUKHARA is renowned among the cities of Central Asia for its architectural and cultural monuments. Its long history is full of drama. More than once the city became the capital of extensive empires; more than once it was sacked by invading hordes. And every period, peaceful or stormy, that it lived through, left its legacy of splendid buildings—palaces, mosques and mausoleums.

From a distance, from the surrounding cotton fields, Bukhara seems untouched by time. Over the crenellated mud walls loom rectangular buildings surmounted by the arches of great portals. Turquoise domes shine in the sun, and over them all soars the fretted crown of a minaret. Five centuries ago this same serrated skyline greeted the gaze of the traveller who with his caravan had traversed many miles of sandy and stoney road.

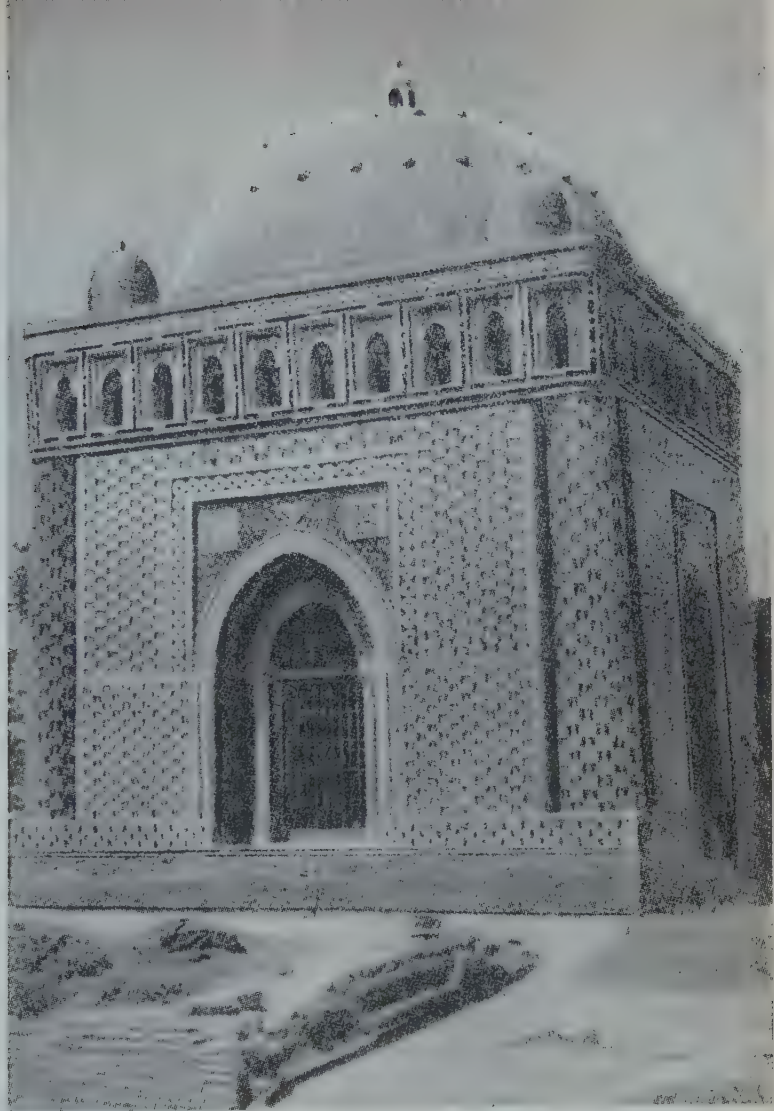
The most ancient part of the city is situated on its western outskirts some way from the noisy centre of present-day Bukhara. On the top of a 90-foot-high man-made hill the masters of this rich and fertile region built a great citadel which was for many centuries their residence. Its entrance, with its two white towers, was for long years a symbol of the Emirate of Bukhara. Less than forty years ago¹ the square before the gates was the scene of ruthless executions: the throats of the condemned were cut just as it was done in the seventh century.

Today the citadel is preserved as a museum which also occupies several other ancient buildings, the mosque and the emir's reception court. Small structures with neither artistic nor historic importance have been removed. No new building is allowed in this part of the old city for the layers of earth probably hold immeasurable historical treasures.

One of the first acts of the Soviets was to take steps to preserve and study the cultural riches of the city. The ruins of the emir's palace, which had been set fire to by the rebellious people, were still smoking when the famous orientalist and archeologist Vladimir Vyatkin arrived. A Committee for the Preservation of Ancient Monuments and Art began a systematic restoration work.

Those unfamiliar with the architecture of Central Asia usually imagine it to be something extraordinarily variegated, heavily decorated with bright multi-coloured ornaments. That is true only in part. During the 9th to the 13th centuries Central-Asian architecture had no bright colours, glazings, or mosaics.

¹The Emir of Bukhara was overthrown in 1920. People's Soviet Republic was set up in what had formerly been the Bukhara Emirate. Today, the Bukhara region forms part of the Uzbek S.S.R.



Mausoleum of Ismail
Samanid

Nevertheless, this period is considered its "Golden Age." To this day the buildings of this period strike the eye with the austere beauty of their proportions and the richness of their brickwork patterns.

There is the expression "the ancient stones of Europe." As applied to Bukhara, and indeed to the whole of Central Asia, the word "stones" should be replaced by "bricks." Bricks in the most varied combinations, laid simply or ornamentally and—at a later period—covered with multicoloured glazing—in other

words, brickwork of every kind, formed the very basis of Central-Asian architecture. It is this that gives buildings the characteristic yellowish-gold colour which determines the appearance of Central-Asian cities.

Bukhara is richer than any other city in monuments of that "Golden Age." Among the lawns and flower-beds of what is now the city's park stands one of the most ancient Central-Asian buildings which is still preserved—the famous mausoleum of Ismail Samanid, built in the 9th century. This rectangular structure, narrowing slightly towards the top and surmounted by a dome, has the appearance of lacework, and makes a picture of outstanding elegance and variety. Its interior, the arches and the base of the dome, are also ornamented by brickwork patterns.

The mausoleum is crowned by a gallery, with a number of narrow arches. The gallery is at once beautiful and mysterious. There is no access to it, and its *raison d'être* is a matter for debate among scholars. The majority take the view that it is a survival from ancient temples which had similar galleries for ritualistic purposes.

Before beginning the study and restoration of this remarkable edifice, it had literally to be excavated from among a whole mound of graves. Until recently in Bukhara, as in many other Moslem countries of the East, the dead were not buried, but placed under small brick arched vaults built on the surface. When the area of the cemetery was covered, then the graves rose higher, one layer upon another. Over the space of one thousand years many of these layers were formed around the venerated tomb of Samanid, reaching almost half-way up the building. The archeologist Vasili Shishkin and the architect Nikolai Bachinsky painstakingly restored the mausoleum to its original appearance. Today the golden-tinged, fretted walls and lofty arches of this remarkable building now entering upon its second millenium can be admired through the foliage of the park.

The mausoleum of Ismail Samanid is one of the first of a series of splendid architectural monuments dating from this "Golden Age" of feudal Eastern culture, an age rich in great scholars, poets and architects.

As has already been said, the architecture of the period was of one colour, its only raw material the local golden-yellow brick—but what variety and what expressiveness the ancient builders were able to extract from it!

A small building stood in the crowded square in the very centre of the city. It seemed impossible to determine its date. Thick layers of plaster, the result of scores of crudely-done repairs, and the many extensions had completely robbed it of its form and made it an eyesore. It was difficult to believe that this ugly-looking structure was the mosque of Magoki-Attori mentioned in 12th-century manuscripts. But nevertheless it was so: the age of the building was shown by the layers of soil which during the course of eight centuries had risen almost to the level of the roof, so that the entrance lay in a sort of pit, approached by an external staircase.

Soviet scholars decided to restore the ancient monument. The layers of many centuries—the brick and clay crust which concealed the original structure—



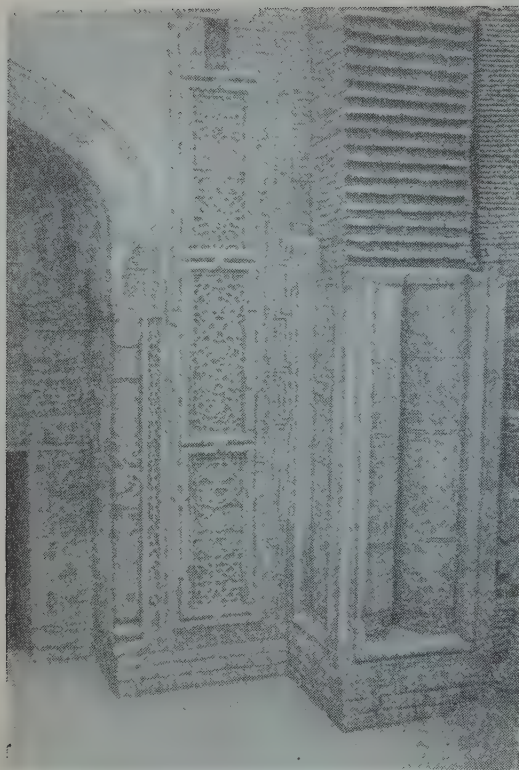
The Madrasah of Ulugbek



The Madrasah of Mir-Arab



The Minaret of Minori-Kalyon



The Mosque of Magoki-Attori

were carefully removed. A portal of great beauty and unusual shape was revealed, entirely covered with the most delicate patterns of carved polished bricks. There was a turquoise inscription on a lofty arch supported by two carved stone columns. Such composition and such architectural details had not hitherto been encountered in Central-Asian architecture. The mosque of Magoki-Attori assumed a place of honour in the history of Central-Asian art and became one of the city's finest ornaments.

The buildings of the 11th and 12th centuries in the main develop the tradition of the Samanid mausoleum. They also are in monochrome (with the exception of frescoes of sacred texts in blue relief), but their carved brick ornamentation is much richer and more delicate. The builders of the Samanid mausoleum achieved a decorative effect by simple means: they either used double bricks, or placed them vertically, or at an angle. That did not satisfy the architects of the 12th century: they decorated the walls of their buildings with the most

delicate brickwork designs, including plaits, rosettes and chains.

Among the smaller monuments of that era there is one without which Bukhara would be inconceivable, in the same way that Rome would be inconceivable without St. Peter's. This is the great minaret of Minori-Kalyon, a lofty pillar, narrowing slightly towards the top, which dominates the entire city. It is crowned by a gallery from which for nine centuries the voice of the muezzin called the faithful to prayer.

Although the minaret is less than 150 feet high, thanks to its harmonious proportions its relationship to the generally low level of the city buildings and the brick ornamentation which rings it from top to bottom, the tower seems immense. But at the same time the minaret, with its amazing unity of stateliness and grace, seems to float over rather than dominate the city. Recently small-scale excavations were carried out at its base. They revealed a massive, octagonal foundation, ornamented by unique carvings.

The minaret is associated with numerous legends, in which it is often difficult to distinguish fact from fiction. Popular belief has it that the emir hurried the architect. But, having laid the foundation, the architect ran away and returned two years later when the foundations had settled enough to make it possible to continue the work. It is said that one bold spirit climbed to the very top of the minaret, clinging on to the brickwork protuberances. The emir ordered that he be executed, reasoning that a man who could climb a vertical wall could also climb in through a window of his palace. It is no legend, though, that the minaret was for a long time an instrument of execution—the condemned were cast down from the top of it.

A particularly large number of the architectural monuments of Bukhara belong to the 16th century when the city, after having endured the Mongol invasion and the devastating wars of Tamerlane, again became an important political and cultural centre.

During this period the monochrome brick ornamentation gives place to a luxurious mosaic of glittering blue, lilac, gold, and green. This multicoloured decoration of spiral stems and flowers, delicate patterns and an intricate network of Arabic letters—is formed of closely fitting tiles of different tints. Mosaics were not of course used on every wall—they were too expensive and difficult. It was in the main used on the high portals, on the bands of the domes and on the walls of the inner courts.

The madrasah of Mir-Arab is perhaps the best-known Bukharan building of this period. Its impressive mosaic portal rises up alongside the great minaret of Minori-Kalyon. Behind it is a rectangular court, surrounded by two-storeyed galleries with lofty loggias. Small carved doorways, through which it is impossible to pass without stooping, lead into narrow rooms like those in a fortress. To this day the peace of the court is broken only by the chanting of prayers and the uneven choir of voices learning passages of the Koran. The madrasah continues as hitherto to be a Moslem religious seminary.

Bukhara is rich not only in monuments of religious architecture; it has also many secular structures



The Madrasah of Abdul Aziz-khan

which have been in use for many centuries. In the city centre at the intersection of many streets stand large brick domes surrounded, like hens by their brood, by smaller domes. They were built 400 years ago to protect buyers and sellers from the sun: every corner, every niche of this unique bazaar is taken up by stalls. Alongside stand public baths of the same period. They are still functioning today, but now they do not use the dirty water of the city's open *aryks*, but the modern water-mains.

The secular structures are more modest in appearance than the madrasahs and mosques. Their beauty lies not in rich facings but in their light, delicate design. Scholars and restorers treat them with no less reverence than they do the lavishly-ornamented mosques.

The difficult art of restoration, which calls for great technical, historical and artistic knowledge, has drawn upon the skill of many generations of Bukhara's famous builders. The present-day Bukharan masters such as Rabidzan Kurbanov and Amindzan Salyamov combine the art of their ancestors with up-to-date building techniques. Thanks to their skill ancient walls and domes have been restored in their original appearance, stalactite arches again soar up and the beautiful mosaics have come back to life in the original splendour of their colours.

Unfortunately many secrets of the ancient art were lost during the long years of cultural decline of Bukhara under the Emirate. These secrets are now being probed by architects, painters, and historians as well as by craftsmen. Some are studying the ancient design of arches and domes, while others are trying to define the rules governing the complex geometric ornamentation, the techniques used in making the mosaics and the forgotten technique of *kundal* painting.

Buildings in which this technique is used look as if they come from a fairy-tale. Imagine a dark-blue background upon which a delicate gold plant pattern stands out in bold relief. This pattern is found in both mosques in the madrasah of Abdul Aziz-khan, built in the 17th century, which constitutes the last of a series of great madrasahs of the "classical" period of Bukharan architecture. But these buildings, despite their splendid *kundal* interiors and the elegance of the majolica ornamentation of their portals, cannot be compared with those of earlier centuries. Their great size is merely oppressive. They lack the most important thing—the harmonious proportion so characteristic of the best Central-Asian architecture.

With the 18th century begins the at first unnoticeable decline of Bukharan architecture. Mosaic almost disappears; it is too expensive and difficult and it is replaced by glazed tiles, with carelessly executed patterns. The builders' attention is concentrated upon the façade. It does not matter that the lay-out is inconvenient or the rooms dark—all that is inside and cannot be seen. But the façade can, and it must testify to the wealth and power of the person who has commissioned the work. As a result, immense portals were erected, with only their façade covered with multicoloured tiles, while on the inside they remained

bare brick—like the back of a stage décor. Gradually large-scale building also became a thing of the past.

After the 17th century the architects of Bukhara produced no outstanding work. A once-brilliant art gradually perished. This decline continued for more than two centuries, until it was arrested by the revolution of 1920, which set the city's ancient culture on a new road.

* *
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Recently I revisited Bukhara after an absence of five years. Once again I saw my beloved ancient buildings, with their domes and arches soaring into the ash-blue sky. I visited old friends and once again drank in the charm of a life in which the best features of the past merged with the achievements of contemporary culture. And I realized that this beautiful ancient yet vigorous city, with its dramatic history is worthy of a fame equal to that of the other famous cities of the world.

COMPOSERS OF SOVIET AZERBAIDJAN

A HIGH treble rings forth, it could be easily mistaken for a woman's voice but for its power and endurance. The melody is intricate and simple at one and the same time—simple, as it consists of but one or two tones in close neighbourhood; intricate, because of the countless changes it undergoes—with each repetition it dons fresh and ever more gorgeous garments.

It is a *mugam*¹—one of the celebrated mugams, the pride of Azerbaidjanian folk-music.

There seems to be no limit to the creative imagination of the people. The delightful melody, delicately ornamented with the short, fleeting grace-notes so characteristic of oriental music, passes artlessly on to a recitative rendered in tense, sing-song manner. This, in turn, is followed by an orchestral passage in brisk and stirring dance rhythm. Then comes the recitative again, and again the melody. . . .

There are seven key-mugams at the root of Azerbaidjan folk-music. Each of them is linked with a definite human emotion, i. e.—the manly and spirited mugam *Rast*, the cheerful, lyrical *Shur*, the *Segyakh* mugam which portrays deep love, the passionate and impetuous *Chargyakh*, the sorrowful *Bayati-Shiraz*, the melancholy and mournful *Shushter* and *Khumayun*. These basic mugams in their various combinations constitute 84 modes which have been communicated verbally through the generations by the *ashugs*—folk-singers of Azerbaidjan.

I have dealt at such length with the mugams to show, to some extent at least, how the way was paved for a golden age of professional music in Azerbaidjan.

Today, when the names of Azerbaidjanian composers are known far afield, it is hard to believe that national professional music is but a few decades old.

Though literary works of the 12th century bear witness to the great variety in Azerbaidjanian folk-music, and history has handed down to us the names of the outstanding music theorists of the Middle Ages—Urmevi and Maragi, at the dawn of the 20th century Uzeir Gadzhibekov was practically the only professional musician in Azerbaidjan.

The year 1908 witnessed the birth of the first Azerbaidjanian opera—*Leili and Medzhnun* by Uzeir Gadzhibekov. We can judge of the worth of this opera from what the composer has to say—at the time he was quite in the dark as to the ABC of musical theory; the orchestra consisted of a few folk instruments, a violin or two, and some woodwinds to top it off; the conductor could not read notes, while the soloists improvised the music within the mode indicated by the composer and in keeping with what was going on on the stage! To crown it all, the

¹ A *mugam* is a musical mode, a particular system or constitution of sounds in their interrelation, comparable with the major and minor keys. The term may also refer—as it does here—to a vocal or instrumental piece in one of the mugam modes.

part of the youthful and gentle *Leili* was performed by a male artiste, Faradzhev, for in those days, women in Azerbaidjan were not permitted to tread the stage.

In 1938, only 30 years later, the same Gadzhibekov wrote: "In those days, when *Leili* and *Medzhnun* had its first appearance, could we in our wildest dreams have foreseen that the time would come when we would have orchestras, conductors, singers, decorators, and an opera house of our own? All this is at our service now."

Wherein lies the secret for such rapid achievements in the field of music? What compelled Azerbaidjan in such a short period of time to cover the path from one-part singing to the most complex musical genres, from the antique instruments to the present-day symphony orchestra, from verbal folklore to a musical science? To my mind, not to the ability of one or two individuals does this youthful school of music owe its existence. Azerbaidjanian composers are a friendly lot and their ranks increase steadily with every year. Painstaking and exacting to a remarkable degree as concerns their own work and that of their comrades, they have a clear conception of the creative problems facing them and to be solved in common. These qualities have always stood them in good stead and helped them to win recognition.

And what is of no less importance, Azerbaidjanian composers are united by the common desire to be closer to folk melodies, for it is from this generous source that they draw their inspiration and the expressive characteristics of their art—its harmonic, melodic, and orchestral colouring. However, this feature does not smother their individualities by any means. Nor does it reduce to a common level creative personalities and personal inclinations. Kara Karayev, Fikret Amirov, Seid Rustamov, Sultan Gadzhibekov, Dzhevdzhet Gadzhiev, and Niyazi differ in style, technique and perception of life—each of them manifests hallmarks of his own.

The Azerbaidjanian school of composition taken as a whole, however, has two fundamental trends, two approaches to folklore.

Azerbaidjan

Soviet Azerbaidjan, the largest of the Transcaucasian republics, has a well-developed industry and agriculture and is a major oil and cotton producing region of the U.S.S.R.

Before the Revolution Azerbaidjan was known exclusively for the Baku oil fields. Now it is a land of advanced machine-building, ferrous and non-ferrous metallurgy, of cotton production, and an important chemical industry. Not only oil but steel pipes, aluminium and iron ore are among Azerbaidjan's industrial products.

Azerbaidjan has 3,616 schools, which had an enrolment of 600,000 children last year. Azerbaidjan's 15 higher schools had an enrolment of 35,000 in 1957, the fortieth year of Soviet government. As many as 160 Doctors and 1,500 Candidates of Sciences are employed in various scientific institutions in the republic.

There are over 17,000 women school-teachers and 300 women scientific researchers in Azerbaidjan; 168 Azerbaidjan women are Heroes of Socialist Labour; thousands of women have been decorated with orders and medals of the U.S.S.R. Among the members of the U.S.S.R. Supreme Soviet are 15 women from Azerbaidjan, while there are about 10,000 women in local Soviets.

The most outstanding representative of the first of these is Fikret Amirov. The determinant feature of his creative method is melodiousness. Melodic variety is the quality that permeates his works. Folklore has greatly influenced this composer. Sweeping melodies, ornamental embellishments, declamatory recitatives—all these attributes of ashug execution are present in Amirov's works. This refers in equal measure to his opera *Sevil* which is devoted to the emancipation of Azerbaidjanian women, and to his symphonic works, the most significant of which are the symphony *In Memory of Nizami* and the symphonic mugams *Shur* and *Kyurdi Ovshary*. Whatever the subject-matter and the emotional content of his compositions, he strives to give true-to-life depictions of his people—their characteristics, their optimism, and he presents the material in the form that can be digested best.

Amirov's links with folk-music are not only close but *immediate* as well. In this connection, his symphonic mugams *Shur* and *Kyurdi Ovshary* occupy a place apart. Many a composer of Azerbaidjan has made use of mugam melody and rhythm to express national colouring. Fikret Amirov, however, set himself a more independent and bolder objective: to present the mugam as a finished piece of music, like the suite or rhapsody, in symphonic form. In other words, all devices of modern orchestral composition—symphonic colouring, polyphony, etc., were to be employed to enrich the mugam. But this did not mean a mere "quoting" of folk-tunes with orchestral accompaniment attached. The composer set out to achieve symphonization in keeping with the peculiarity of form and the ways and means of execution of each specific mugam, and was successful in his quest.

Kara Karayev, author of the ballet *The Seven Beauties*, the symphonic poem *Leili and Medzhnun*, the *Viet-Nam Rhapsody*, and other compositions, is spokesman for the second trend of the Azerbaidjanian school of music. The breath of his native land, of its songs, dances, poems, is clearly perceptible in his works. Even when he turns to the music of other nations (*The Albanian Rhapsody* and the ballet *The Path of Thunder*—the latter is based on a novel by Abrahams and deals with events in South Africa), he remains Azerbaidjanian, just as the Russian classics Glinka and Borodin, when they were composing the oriental scenes to their operas, remained Russian.

A characteristic feature of Karayev's is the versatility of his themes, hence the wealth of musical images and emotional intensiveness of his works. It would be hard to put one's finger on the sphere he prefers. The lyrical, the heroic, the grotesque, the fantastic, realistic scenes, character depictions—all of these are treated by him with equal attention. Karayev makes free and diverse use of folk genres and forms and of the artistic achievements of his native land, in keeping with the ideological content of the composition and the objective it sets. Elements of national melody and the outlines of the *Chargyakh*, *Rast*, *Shur*, *Segyakh*, and other modes are easily discernible in his music. But if in Amirov's conception the *Shur* is a finished form, subject to the laws and ways of a specific mode, Karayev regards it as a mere shading, to be treated freely and daringly.

An enquiry into the works of other Azerbaidjanian composers sheds light on their personal reactions towards these two trends in music.

Dzhevdzhet Gadzhiev, a born symphonist, has a bent for the monumental, the philosophical. This is a creative personality akin to Kara Karayev. Intense, passionate feeling, and profundity of thought are the characteristic features of his major compositions—the Fourth Symphony, dedicated to the memory of Lenin and the symphonic poem *For Peace*. This method of imparting new substance to folk-themes and viewing national traditions from a broad standpoint is part and parcel of Dzhangir Dzhangirov's works too.

Among the representatives of the second trend the following deserve special mention: Sultan Gadzhibekov—author of a number of symphonic works and of the ballet *Gyulshen*, Seid Rustamov known for his popular songs and compositions for folk orchestras. Mitkhat Akhmedov—symphonist and author of the symphonic poem *Bakhrām Gur* based on the verses of Nizami and of the symphony *In Memory of the 26 Commissars of Baku* which recalls pages from the heroic revolutionary struggle of the people of Azerbaidjan. This list should include Niyazi as well—conductor and composer who, in his symphonic mugam *Rast*, strove to commit to symphonic form the pearls of Azerbaidjanian folk-music.

Azerbaidjanian composers of the older and middle generations stand out for their creative enthusiasm and their burning desire to put an end to the "stagnation" of professional music in their country and to close up the gaps of the past. Younger composers go even further in their enthusiasm and display even more daring in their seekings.

Rauf Gadzhiev, born in 1922, has but recently come to the fore. His Violin Concerto and *Youth Symphony* was his original contribution; with national elements assumed as a basis, he applies to these works realistic devices in keeping with the best traditions of present-day Russian symphonism. Gadzhiev, however, is now considered "grown-up," and Gasan Rzayev (born in 1926), the author of a series of chamber-pieces and of an interesting programme-symphony, *Babek*, has stepped into his shoes. Babek is a national hero who led the liberation struggle against the Arabian conquerors of the 9th century, and his image still dwells in ancient legends and songs and in the memory of the people.

Next in order comes Azer Rzayev. He is only 27, but his creative personality and artistic designs are clearly defined in his works. His First Concerto for violin and orchestra (incidentally his graduate work, awarded 3rd prize at the Fifth World Youth Festival in Warsaw) and his Second Violin Concerto are striking examples of the spontaneity of perception and youthful passion.

The above-mentioned are the most gifted among the young musicians of Azerbaidjan. In common with the rest of Azerbaidjanian musicians, they show profound respect for national traditions, and are impelled by the ardent desire to bring out to the full the characteristics and the spirit of their people. Philosophical treatment, emotional contrast and the vivid language of the people distinguish the works of the "senior" composers. Following in their wake and armed with these principles, Azerbaidjanian youth is making rapid progress and is participating with increasing activity in the musical life of the republic.

MY COTTON-GROWING FRIENDS

Do you know what a *sil* is? In the Arab language this word means a turbulent torrent.

And the Uzbeks and Tadjiks of the Fergana Valley call the sudden flood-waters that bring down with them avalanches of stones, *sils*. The *sils* appear after heavy rains, and their rumbling comes to you from far away, from the very peaks of the mountains. A grey-brown wave rushes headlong down with an ominous roar of pebbles and the boom of boulders crashing against one another.

Then the torrent passes. The path it leaves behind in some ravine is once more a dry wilderness and the sand storms rage about the rocky crags of the hills.

Nozirboi Mazairov was born quite near one of these ravines. It is called the Kairak-kum which means stinging sands. Five years ago there was nothing there but the sand which blew into your clothes and your shoes. But now that the Syr Darya has been barred by a hydropower station a large lake has spread out in the Kairak-kum. It is called the Tadjik Sea, and is the biggest in Central Asia, being sixty kilometres long and twenty across. The Tadjik Sea has brought life-giving water to a vast area around and has changed the whole life of the people there.

Nozirboi is a mechanic working on bulldozers and scrapers, one of the many who "mould the earth," transform the sandy stretches of the desert into arable land. For some three years Nozirboi's team have been fighting hard for every acre of reclaimed land. The little caravan houses where the bulldozer drivers live move further and further out from their native village. It is not easy to tame the wild lands of the Dasht valley. The foothills are cleft with ravines and water-courses. The boulders that were once brought crashing down by the torrential flood-waters of the *sils* still lie under the top-soil, preventing the bulldozers from biting into the earth. They have to be dug clear, tied round with a rope, dragged out by one or more tractors and thrown to one side. It is a hellish, wearisome job.

And Nozirboi himself finds it hard to believe that the wide flat fields were, such a short time ago, rocky outcrops of the mountains.

The first cotton was sown on the fields wrested from the wilderness in the spring of 1956, and in the autumn the villagers of Dasht saw that the former desert lands seamed with the paths of the *sils* were becoming fertile plantations.

It was from that time that Nozirboi Mazairov earned the special esteem of his countrymen who not long ago elected him to the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R.

Reportage

The life of Muradali Kambarov is the story of one of the men who helped to bring new life to the valley of the Vakhsh. The river Vakhsh is a tributary of the Pianj, which runs along the Afghan border. Nowadays it is easy to get to the Vakhsh. Cars race along the road from Stalinabad to the pass, up the snow-covered hairpin bends above the mountain villages, along the ravines. In a few hours you are already in the valley where the grass is green all the year round and the buds begin to swell on the peach-trees in January.

But for the first cotton-growers who came to the Valley of the Vakhsh, the journey was not so easy. Those who went there in the early thirties, leaving their homes far away, set out on a long trek from the north of Tadzhikistan to its southernmost tip.

Muradali Kambarov was one of these first settlers who boldly broke with the past, with the beggarly life of the old days, and went to the valley of the Vakhsh where deft-handed cotton-growers were needed. The first pioneers saw before them a dismal scene. Wherever they looked the endless plain stretched before them, overgrown with scrub and thickets where wild boars and tigers had their lairs. There was no road, no path, not one tree to shade them from the burning sun. It was not easy to begin a new life in this barren wilderness.

Today, when you drive along the wide roads of the valley, past the great dams and hydropower stations, the orchards and groves, the irrigation ditches filled with babbling water and the pleasant villages, you think back with gratitude to those who were the first to come to the valley, to cultivate the soil, sow cotton, and plant orchards and vineyards.

I stayed with Muradali, now advanced in years and chairman of the "Bolshevik" collective farm. His flat-roofed hut of sunbaked bricks was rather plain and homely to look at. Many of the collective farmers had already moved to new houses, but old Muradali did not want to leave the home he had built himself so long ago. Beside

Uzbekistan

The Golodnaya (Hunger) Steppe. . . . The very name used to strike fear in the hearts of men. From ancient times it was the symbol of barrenness, for there was no water there. Down through the centuries preceding 1917 no more than 36,000 hectares of the Golodnaya Steppe had been irrigated. Only after 1918, when Lenin signed a decree allocating 50,000,000 roubles for irrigation work, did the Golodnaya Steppe begin to come alive. Today the region has changed beyond recognition, with cotton plantations stretching far and wide, orchards in blossom, green grass blanketing the steppe. The desert has been transformed by the will of Soviet people, who have already reclaimed 200,000 hectares, of which 105,000 is in the Uzbek republic. The Golodnaya Steppe yields a quarter of a million tons of cotton annually.

Before the Revolution almost the entire Uzbek population was illiterate. There were only 160 schools with 17,300 pupils on the territory of what is now the Uzbek republic. Today the entire population is literate. There are more than 5,500 schools with an

enrolment exceeding 1,300,000; thirty-six higher schools with 70,000 students; and one hundred specialized technical schools with 60,000 students.

An Academy of Sciences was established in the Uzbek republic in 1943. It consists of 26 research institutes, including a recently organized Institute of Nuclear Physics. In the past three years it has sent more than twenty-five representatives to international congresses, where they delivered reports on the work of Uzbek scientists and scholars.

As many as 54 magazines and 197 newspapers are now published in the Uzbek republic. Of these some 150 newspapers are in the Uzbek or Kara-Kalpak languages. Before the Revolution there was only one Uzbek language newspaper in existence.

In 1914, 80 physicians, 65 out-patient clinics, and 64 hospitals with accommodations for 1,028 patients constituted the sum total of medical service on the territory of what is now the Uzbek republic. As many as 30 children out of every hundred died before they were a year old. Today there are 65 times as many doctors as before the Revolution. The number of hospitals, clinics, and other medical centres has increased accordingly.

Women of the East were among the most oppressed

the hut there was a shed covered with curling vines and in the garden stood the smoke-blackened stove where the flat round loaves of Tadjik bread were baked, flanked by a row of peach-trees and a spreading mulberry-tree. All this gave the little house an air of a real home where a well-ordered life had been firmly built up.

Muradali himself had jet-black hair and a face burnt to a dark bronze by long years of work in the cotton fields. His intelligent, quick eyes and rapid, assured movements showed that he was a determined, and even imperious, man. Indeed, only people of such characters could overcome all the difficulties of taming the turbulent rivers, and cultivating the unyielding, indomitable soil.

Even in the quiet days of winter, people are always coming to call on Muradali, and he rarely has time to sit idly at home. The chairman's sharp eyes, his commanding voice and his personal example are needed everywhere. The first long-fibred cotton was sown on the "Bolshevik" fields twenty years ago. This was a revolution, for before that Muradali, like his father and his grandfather, had only sown *guza* cotton which gives a much coarser fibre. Muradali spent his childhood among the low-growing bushes with their small cotton-bolls that did not even open by themselves, so that the fibres had to be picked by hand. When he looks back on his childhood, Muradali remembers his father who had just one ox; he used to borrow a second one from his neighbour to make up the ox-team, and lend him his in return. Who thought of scientific agriculture in those days? It was only when Muradali came to the valley of the Vakhsh that he learnt what it means to work with tractors and to practise crop rotation with lucerne.

Muradali is a man who understands his job thoroughly. He is strict and exacting, but he knows how to inspire people with his own love of work.

Today the "Bolshevik" farm has its agronomist, as have all the other big farms. But even the agronomist sometimes has to listen to the old practical worker. In the spring Muradali rises

before dawn and spends the early morning hours walking through the fields. He strides slowly over the freshly ploughed soil and frequently bends down to pick up a clod of earth. He squeezes it in his hand and throws it up into the air so that it crumbles down in a little cloud of dust. And if a tiny whisp of steam rises up, if a sensation of warmth lingers on Muradali's palm from the pressure of the earth, this means that *savir* time has come, the time when, according to the most elusive signs, the cotton should be sown.

When he comes back from his walk on a morning like this, Muradali says:

"The earth is warm enough for the cotton seeds. We can start sowing!"

All kinds of people work on the collective farm that is directed by Muradali. There are settlers from the north and people who have lived all their lives in these parts. You can see this even if you meet them in the fields. Beside young girls wearing either shawls or kerchiefs on their heads, there are women with the high turbans worn only in Turkmenia.

"Yes, we have many varied people here," Muradali's Turkmen neighbour told me. "But we all live and work together as friends."

One of the men to address the nation-wide conference of cotton-growers which was held in February of 1958 in Moscow was Hasanbai Saibbayev, a collective farm chairman from the Namangan region of Uzbekistan.

His speech attracted a great deal of attention. He spoke of the new quadratic sowing method based on narrowly spaced rows, which his farm widely used. It is now being applied all over the Soviet Central-Asian republics.

Hasanbai is an old friend of mine. He has just celebrated his forty-third birthday and is in the flower of his life. He began his working days immediately he left school, when he was appointed cashier at the "Gairat" collective farm in his native village. He was then still a boy. Later he was put in charge of the granaries.

beings on earth. The October Revolution provided Uzbek women with equal opportunities in all fields. More than 4,000 women are doctors and 15,000 are school-teachers. As many as 16 women have taken their Doctor's degrees and 400 their Candidate's degrees in various subjects. There are 16 Uzbek women in the U.S.S.R. Supreme Soviet and 167 in the Supreme Soviet of the Uzbek S.S.R. and the Kara-Kalpak Autonomous Republic. Women comprise almost one-third of the members of local Soviets.

The October Revolution brought emancipation to the Kara-Kalpak people. The Kara-Kalpak Autonomous Republic was formed as part of the Uzbek S.S.R. in 1936. The achievements of these people, formerly the most backward in a very backward Turkestan, are tremendous. The Kara-Kalpaks had no written language, no industry, and an extremely primitive agriculture. Today 5,228 teachers (including 1,217 women) in 538 schools teach 84,000 pupils; two higher schools, three teachers' training colleges, and four specialized technical schools train specialists from among the native population. The Kara-Kalpak Autonomous Republic has 1,189 factories, many of which are large industrial enterprises.

Like thousands more of his countrymen, Hasanbai went into the army when the Patriotic War broke out and fought on many fronts. He was severely wounded during the defence of Leningrad and returned home to his native village on crutches. He went back to his old job of looking after the farm's granaries. His wounds healed, and he threw away his crutches. The old men began to look upon him as a serious chap who took a real interest in agronomy, and in 1945 he was elected chairman of the collective farm. As head of the farm, Hasanbai never ignored the opinions of the old men; their wide experience helped him to avoid many mistakes and to raise the productivity of the cotton plantations.

When several of the small local collective farms merged together and formed a big one, Saibbayev was again elected chairman.

As the collective farm grew richer, his worries increased, too. One must know a great deal about agronomy if one is to direct a big mechanized farm. The young people started attending specialized courses. And not only the young people! Many of the older generation also went to agronomy courses at Tashkent and Namanagan. Hasanbai longed to study, but it was only after he had spent many years directing the farm that he was able to go to a special course for collective farm chairmen.

When he came back from the course, Hasanbai worked with more confidence than ever. On the collective farm board, alongside the old practical cotton-growers, there were now others who had taken agronomy courses. They invited also a specialist with university training to come and work on the farm. The farm income grew. Now the villages that make up the collective farm have two power stations, several dairy farms, a new club, a clinic, and hundreds of new, modern houses.

Hasanbai Saibbayev drives around the farm every day. He spends much time walking through the different fields, carefully checking up on the work of the tractor drivers, making sure that the irrigation ditches are being cleaned properly and the machinery is in good working order.

Hard work, the application of the latest scientific methods and the use of machinery—all this brings good results. In 1957 the collective farmers received twenty roubles and two and a half kilograms of grain for each work-day unit. The long years of work put in by this big family of collective farmers did not go unnoticed. The state awarded the title Hero of Socialist Labour to Nuritdin Abdulayev, one of the farm's team-leaders. This title was also conferred on Saibbayev under whose leadership the farm achieved such outstanding success.

The story of another Uzbek cotton-grower, Ahmadali Hudaiberdyev is rather similar to Hasanbai Saibbayev's. Hudaiberdyev began his working life as a labourer, turning the soil with a *ketmen*, a kind of sharp-pointed hoe. Now he is one of the champions of mechanized work on the cotton fields. Both of them went through the war, both, on returning home to their native village, succeeded in winning respect and authority among the people.

Hudaiberdyev's childhood was in no way remarkable. His father was one of the poorest labourers in the village of Kusa. Hudaiberdyev recalls that he only got his first leather boots when he was already in his late teens. For a long time he worked as a labourer, loosening the soil between the rows of cotton-bushes with heavy blows of his ketmen. As he looked at his companions, exhausted by their toil, and at his own blistered hands, he dreamed of the time when machines would come and completely take the place of men.

The years went by. Ahmadali Hudaiberdyev became a team-leader. He learnt a great deal and came to understand many things. And he still pondered on the ways in which the cotton-growers' toil could be lightened. How could things be managed so that machines would utterly banish the ketmen and the hard manual work from the cotton fields?

The answer was to sow cotton by the quadratic method so that the bushes would grow up an even distance from each other. Then tractor-drawn cultivators would be able to do the job of turning up the soil which was such hard work with the ketmens.

When he became chairman of the big united "Fergana" collective farm, Hudaiberdyev began to put his idea into practice and built up a group of bold enthusiasts who were willing to experiment. In 1956 they tried out the method on a few fields and were the first in the district to cultivate the cotton without ketmens.

Hudaiberdyev will never forget that summer. He followed the work of his tractor-driving friends with great anxiety. The iron jaws of the cultivators opened wider and wider, they moved nearer and nearer to the green cotton bushes. Finally, when only five centimetres round each bush remained untouched, the goal had been reached; after this the ketmens became a thing of the past.

The fields cultivated by machine gave a much bigger harvest. But it was not only the economic results that were important to Hudaiberdyev and his friends. The great thing was that people had been freed from exhausting, back-breaking toil.

In the corridors of the Kremlin palace where the nation-wide conference of cotton-growers met, you could see Ahmadali Hudaiberdyev surrounded by delegates from all the other cotton-growing republics. He was eager to give the most detailed answers to all their questions.

The conference decided to go over to the complete mechanization of cotton growing within the next two or three years in the other Central-Asian republics.

In these short notes about my cotton-growing friends, I have mentioned their joyless, burdensome past. But without going back to these years, it would be difficult to understand the sharp change that has occurred in the lives of these people since the October Revolution. The conquest of the Revolution awakened the inexhaustible creative energy of millions of simple peasants who are transforming the deserts and the barren tracts of Central Asia into flowering cotton fields, orchards, and vineyards.

Kirghizia

"We set out for a country described by bourgeois story-tellers as an uncivilized and exotic land," wrote Julius Fučík, referring to Kirghizia. "But we arrived in a country whose rate of construction was much higher than that of the most advanced, the most 'civilized,' countries of the capitalist West."

There are now 472 large industrial establishments equipped with the most up-to-date machinery in Kirghizia, where before the Revolution there were only 55 small workshops. The daily output of Kirghizia's factories and mills equals the total annual output of all Kirghizia's industry before the Revolution.

Here is what a pre-Revolution guide-book said about Pishpek, now Frunze, the capital of Kirghizia: "Swiss cheese is made in Pishpek, there are two tanneries and a dairy in the town. Of the 750 buildings, 728 are adobe houses with rush roofs."

Present-day Frunze," a city of factories, colleges, theatres, is nothing like old Pishpek. In 1956 the population of the city was 190,000, as against 14,000 in 1913.

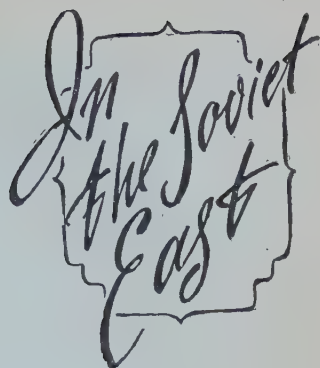
The Kirghizians had no alphabet before the Revolution and only one or two per hundred of the population were literate. Today compulsory seven-year schooling has been introduced throughout the republic. The republic's 1,718 schools are attended by over 325,000 pupils. In Soviet times 9 higher educational institutions and 28 specialized secondary schools have been opened in the republic.

The Academy of Sciences of the Kirghizian S.S.R. is the centre of scientific activities in the republic. It has 8 institutes and 35 laboratories with a staff of 1,700 researchers.

In 1956 there were 111 times as many doctors and 92 times as much hospital accommodation in Kirghizia as in 1913.

The lot of Kirghizian women was a hard one before the Revolution. Women were regarded as the property of their husbands and, like property, were inherited by the husband's relatives after his death. There was not a single literate Kirghizian woman before the Revolution. Today there are ten thousand women teachers in Kirghizia and 3,000 girls studying in the republic's colleges. As many as 6,344 women have been elected to the U.S.S.R. Supreme Soviet, the Kirghizian Supreme Soviet and local Soviets.

The first literary work ever printed in Kirghizia appeared in 1924. Today Kirghizians read the works of Pushkin, Mayakovsky, Tolstoy, Gorky in their native language. The works of Satylganov, Tokombayev, Sydykbekov, and other Kirghizian writers have been translated into Russian and other languages of the U.S.S.R. As many as 7,900 books in editions totalling 53,000,000 copies have been published in Kirghizia in the past thirty years.



Victor BAIDERIN

The Firdousi Library

A middle-aged man in an embroidered skull-cap and a black padded robe walked slowly round the Firdousi Public Library in Stalinabad, the capital of Tadjikistan. And from the wide-eyed look of interest on his face you could see that it was the first time he had been inside the big, light building. But, from the way he walked so confidently from room to room and easily found the way into the seven-tier depository, you got the impression that this man was very familiar with the place.

"So that's what it's like now!" said this visitor in oriental costume as he continued to tour the library.

"I suppose it is a long time since you've been here," said the librarian who was taking the stranger over the premises.

"Ten years."

"Ten years? Excuse me, but ten years ago our library was not even open. It was just being built!"

"That's right! And I was there, for I helped to build it!"

The bricklayer Mahmud Rahimov had returned to Stalinabad after ten years, during which he had worked on many big construction sites in Tadjikistan. And first of all he wanted to see the building where he had learnt the rudiments of his trade. When he was working there he had heard from the engineers and architects that it would be a big library. But what he saw when he

looked round the building after ten years surpassed all he had imagined.

"How many books have you here?" he asked.

"One million two hundred thousand."

"And how many readers are there?"

"Some thirteen thousand."

From that very day, Mahmud Rahimov became one of the library's subscribers.

Today you can often see him sitting in one of the five reading-rooms with a pile of books stacked in front of him, the places marked with slips of white paper. Their titles indicate the subject that interests Mahmud most of all—*Building, The Builder's Handbook, Architecture*. Indeed, he has been fascinated by the subject ever since he first began taking evening courses at the Stalinabad Technical School.

Among Mahmud's neighbours at the big table in the reading room you can find students of Tadjikistan's Lenin University, of the Avicenna Medical Institute, the Agricultural Institute, the Shevchenko Teachers' Training College and of many other institutes and colleges in Stalinabad.

The library's stock of books is extremely large and varied; it receives copies of books put out by all the publishing houses of the Soviet Union. New books are also sent there from Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan, India, China, Korea, France, Italy, Britain, and other countries. In fact, the number of foreign books increases so quickly that a short time ago the library had to open a special room for them.

The librarians give special attention to books on the Middle East and Central Asia, searching for them everywhere and collecting them with great care. The scholars of Tadjikistan, Uzbekistan, and other



Central-Asian republics are particularly interested in Oriental history and literature.

All Oriental literature, from ancient, yellowed manuscripts to the latest publications, is in constant demand.

The young Firdousi library can truly be proud of its rich collection of manuscripts. At present there are over three thousand manuscripts on its shelves, while the library recently handed over more than four thousand rare manuscripts to the Institute of History, Language and Literature of the Tadjik Academy of Sciences.

The manuscripts include the works of Abu Ali ibn Sina (Avicenna), Rudaki, Firdousi, Omar Khayyam, Kamol Hudjendi, Tabari, Al-Biruni, Jami, and many other outstanding Oriental scholars and writers of ancient times.

The collection of manuscripts is increasing continually. Last year many interesting and rare books were bought by the library's teams of experts which visited the ancient Central-Asian towns of Bukhara and Samarkand.

In the past few years, as a result of their studies of ancient manuscripts, Tadjik scholars have published many books analyzing the work of the great thinkers of the East.

A large group of scholars is just finishing a book on the work of Rudaki, whose 1100th anniversary will be celebrated this year.

The works of Firdousi, Jami, Al-Biruni, and other writers are now being prepared for publication on the basis of the manuscripts. Such books enjoy wide popularity among the peoples of Soviet Central Asia.

Pavel LUKNITSKY

"Literary Tadjikistan"

The Soviet, as well as the Iranian, public will celebrate the 1100th anniversary of the birth of Rudaki this summer. A new film about Rudaki, produced by the Stalinabad Cinema Studio, will be shown for the occasion. The scenario is by the Tadjik writer Satym Ulug-zade, Kimyagarov is the director.

Ulug-zade's scenario will serve as the starting point for some remarks about the magazine *Literary Tadjikistan*, which is published in the Russian language.

The Tadjik people deeply revere the founder of Tadjik and Iranian early classic poetry, the poet and musician Rudaki, who was born in the village of Pandjudak on the slopes of a mountain ravine near the Zerafshan River. The local people still repeat

the verses of this remarkable poet, which were handed down from generation to generation. The valley of this deep, turbulent river played an important role in the history of the Tadjik people. Some rare documents of the Sogdian written language, which had formerly been unknown to modern mankind, were found near the upper reaches of the river, on Mt. Moog. They were deciphered thanks to the efforts of Academician Krachkovsky and other Soviet scholars.

The scenario about Rudaki has been written by a talented scholar of Tadjik poetry and a profound research worker, whom a rich, creative imagination helped to surmount the difficulties caused by the extreme meagerness of exact facts about the life of the poet. The author of the scenario succeeded in restoring the details of that distant epoch and the specific features characteristic of life and the social relations of those days, and to give vivid pictures of ancient Mave-rannakhr and Bukhara, while presenting events in a tense dramatic setting.

There is no need to give a detailed account of the film about Rudaki, who was taken to the palace of the Samanids, but was driven out in his old age and blinded by the fanatic rulers; it is enough to say that the scenario is both clever and good. Satym Ulug-zade's first large work in the field of cinematography was his scenario for the film *Avicenna*, written jointly with Victor Bitkovich. The film *Avicenna* was very popular. Ulug-zade acquired great experience when making it, and this enabled him to write the new scenario more independently.

Besides this scenario about Rudaki, which the author calls *The Fate of a Poet*, the magazine has a number of works by Tadjik and Russian authors.

Several Tadjik writers died for their country during the Patriotic War. One of them, Khakim Karim, a prose writer, lost his life near Staraya Russa. The talented lyric poet Habib Yusufi perished in the battles for the liberation of Warsaw. Their Russian friend, Grigori Ptitsin, a poet and translator as well as an Orientalist, died in besieged Leningrad. The journal prints the verse of Habib Yusufi, Grigori Ptitsin and a short story by Khakim Karim, *The Widow*, in a section called *Together With Us*.

There is an interesting article by Mirzo Tursun-zade, *An Age of Rapprochement of Peoples*, in which the author, who took part

in the Cairo Conference, tells how his native Tadjikistan participated in the general process of uniting the peace-loving peoples of Asia.

On Indian Soil, travel notes of A. Sonin, who visited the construction site of the Bhakra-Nangal hydroelectric station, the largest in India, is written very vividly. Sonin also attended the "Celebration of Light" in Amritsar and visited the markets in Kashmir, the University of Agra, the palace of the Maharaja of Jaipur and the farms near Chundri Garh.

The magazine is doing an excellent thing in publishing works about the ancient history of the Tadjik people and also articles, stories, and verse about the present-day life of the republic and of other lands whose peoples are fighting energetically for the cause of peace.

Vsevolod REVICH

"Light Over Baikal"

The Buryat-Mongolian A.S.S.R., one of the autonomous republics of the Russian Federation, is situated in the southern part of Eastern Siberia.

The physical features of this small republic are extraordinarily diverse. Here we find boundless Mongolian steppes and the Siberian taiga, the beautiful spurs of the Sayan mountain range and the waters of the deepest lake in the world, Baikal, which has been extolled in scores of folk songs and legends.

The Buryats, a people who, in the recent past, were nomad livestock-breeders, have lived on this soil from times of old. The path traversed by Buryat-Mongolia during the years of Soviet power is similar to that of many other national republics of the Soviet Union which arose in place of the backward hinterland of tsarist Russia. During this period the population of the republic settled on the land, united into collective farms, and are developing their own industry intensively. The culture of the Buryat people has made truly revolutionary progress. Illiteracy has been completely eradicated. Today the people of Buryat-Mongolia say:

"We used to be able to count the number of literate people on our fingers. Now we count the illiterate people and we still have several fingers left over."

The republic has developed its own national literature. The names of its finest writers, Khotsa Namsarayev, Chimit Tsendendambayev, Nikolai Damdinov, are known to Soviet readers the country over. For several years now a literary bi-monthly *Svet nad Baikalom* (Light Over Baikal) has been coming out in Ulan-Ude, the capital of Buryat-Mongolia, in both the native and the Russian languages. This magazine is certainly indicative of the rise in the cultural level of the republic.

Despite its youth, *Svet nad Baikalom* is not inferior to many other republican magazines in quality. Its contributors vividly depict the present-day life of Buryat-Mongolia.

The people still remember the terrible pre-Revolution past of their republic. It is no mere accident that in their articles the authors frequently make comparisons between what was and what is. Typical of such articles is one by Taras Bashkuyev in the fifth number of the journal for 1957, entitled *The Village of Dyrestui Is Born Anew*. The author begins with a typical picture of this pre-Revolution Buryat settlement. At that time the main building in the village was the Buddhist monastery, whither pilgrims made their way in the hope of curing their ailments. Now, in place of the former provincial Dyrestui there is a modern town which has become the centre of the "Communism" collective farm, the largest in the republic.

The contributors to this magazine do not restrict themselves to stories about the life of the modern Buryat village. They also tell about the latest changes in the management of industry, and publish travel notes, descriptions of the first tremendous power station in the Baikal region, the Angara hydroelectric station, and so on.

As in many other young literatures, poetry as yet occupies the chief place in Buryat-Mongolian literature. However, tales, narratives, and novels appear ever more frequently. Last year, for instance, the journal published a novel by Chimit Tsendendambayev called *Far From His Native Steppes*. This is his second book about the outstanding Buryat-Mongolian Dorzhi Banzarov. Born

among people who were backward and ignorant, Banzarov, in the beginning of the past century, thanks to his abilities, joined the ranks of the scientists of his day and became a well-known historian and ethnographer. Tsendendambayev's first book, *Dorzhi, Son of Banzar*, tells of the youth of the hero. The second part of the novel, *Far From His Native Steppes*, is the story of Banzarov's scientific work at Kazan University.

This year the publication of the Buryat-Mongolian epic, *Geser*, which is one of the significant works in world folklore, has been undertaken.

Writers of other republics and regions readily contribute to this journal. It is quite natural to find in it the works of Russian writers, whose themes are especially interesting for the local readers. For instance, the well-known Moscow prose writer, Vsevolod Ivanov, published in it the end of his autobiographical trilogy *Adventures of a Fakir*. The new book, called *We're Going to India*, tells about events which take place in Siberia. Last year the magazine published the novel *My Native Land*, which is the second part of the popular novel *Dauria* by the Siberian writer Konstantin Sedykh. The second part tells of the later life of the heroes of *Dauria* during the Civil War in the Far East.

Svet nad Baikalom also carries stories by Chinese and Indian writers and the works of writers of present-day Mongolia. It tries to widen the horizon of its readers and to acquaint them most fully with the life of their own republic and with what is going on beyond its boundaries.

Georgi VLADIMOV

Tracing a Poet's Life

The short narrative by Khabibulla Nazarov, entitled *In Search of Karim Devon*, is one of the new attempts to fathom the spiritual world of this poet through his private life. The fact that until Soviet days there were no definite data about this interesting Tadjik writer prompted the endeavour to tell of the work of Karim Devon through his

biography. By re-establishing the story of his life and work step by step Nazarov has succeeded in discovering the poet, whose image was as hazy and indistinct as a legend.

Nothing has been preserved either in museum archives or libraries about Karim, whose by-name, Devon, means "mad" or "possessed." Information about him had to be collected in microscopic quantities in villages and on the roads of the Hissar mountain range. It was obtained by questioning those who had known the poet closely and whose memories still retained his verses. Naturally, the narrative not only tells of long and difficult quests, but also of the people without whom Karim Devon's poetry would not have lived to our days. And the story of the lives of these people, old dwellers of Tadjik villages, is organically interwoven with the story about Devon and recreates the life, manners, customs and characters of those years to which Devon's poetry belongs.

There was one circumstance which greatly facilitated the search, and that was the talent of Karim himself. He was a remarkable poet and therefore could not be confused with anyone else. Only in his earliest poems, of which but a few have been preserved, does he follow the traditional extolling of the "nightingale and the rose." The mature Karim imitated neither Omar Khayyam's *Rubaiyat* nor the *gazels* or short pieces of Hafiz. He created his own free, supple, and trenchant verse which seemed to have been written to be declaimed in the streets of villages and market squares. His poetry, which is truly folk poetry, is easily remembered by those who hear it. That explains why the old people who listened to it so very long ago, have not forgotten it. And when they recall these lines they also recall their own lives, with which Karim Devon's poetry is inseparably bound.

Illiterate and a pauper, Karim Devon sang for just such other illiterates and paupers, sharing with them all the trials, torments, and "hell of oppression." Dressed in rags and living from hand to mouth in a nomad's hooded cart, with his wife and two sons, he often roamed the mountain paths.

In some ways he is similar to the beloved hero of numerous eastern legends, Hoja Nasreddin, who was famous for his cunning, daring, and unsuppressed optimism. But Devon was a much more tragic figure. He was pitied

and fed as one pitied and feeds a beggarly and weak-minded religious fanatic, but those fanatics were not respected as Devon was, nor were they waited for by crowds on the wayside as people waited for Karim. He was loved for being irreconcilable, for being unbribable. People knew he refused to accept gifts with which the rich tried to buy his silence. His by-name "Devon" was a touch of slyness on his part, a weak and unstable means of defence that he might speak the truth without fear of being mobbed. But despite this cunning, he had to possess great courage, for the nickname "mad" was unable to save him from mockery and beatings, so great was the hatred of the "powers-that-be" for him, and so impotent were the village people in their attempts to protect him.

It is curious to note that the ordinary folk considered him a saint while the mullahs and officials of the Bukhara emir regarded him as a godless creature. It has probably always been so with those who disturb the peace, those who, on the one hand, are warmed by the love of the people and whom, on the other hand, the hatred of the rich is ready to reduce to ashes. This man "with red, tousled hair, clad in a long torn robe that dragged along the ground, with a big stick in his hands, this man whose fiery gaze was focused straight ahead of him, the people's poet Karim Devon" has remained in the memory of the people as the flaming, ardent defender of the poor.

"I realized," the author of the narrative says, "that Karim Devon was no ordinary street singer, but a native talent who, through his songs, inspired the people to struggle."

Nor could it have been otherwise. When a poet is infinitely concrete and sings only of what he sees and hears, when he resolutely and outrightly calls things by their names—

*Oh how I hate the titled drones!
Judges, emirs, all you food for worms!*

*Where are the rich magnates, their lying laws
and feasts?
Death today has placed her hand upon these
beasts!—*

when, finally, he is so irreconcilable and obstinate that he cannot be made to sing in any other way, one can boldly look for the traces of the part he played in all the popular uprisings of his day.

It was therefore quite natural for the author of the narrative first to assume and then to confirm with facts the direct relation Karim Devon had to the famous Hissar uprising of the peasants against the power of the emir and their own landlords in the autumn of 1908. That was the work of his hands, his talent, and his songs.

Karim Devon died in 1918 during the terrible plague.

Devon lived to witness the October Revolution, and so it may well be that further research will find verse with which he hailed this great event.

The quest for the heritage left by Karim Devon is not over. On the contrary, Khabibulla Nazarov's narrative marks but the beginning of it. More and more people join in that quest. And there is no doubt that the day will come when Karim Devon will rise before us to his full height, every last line of his and every feature of his powerful character having been rescued from oblivion. For, as one of the characters in the narrative says, "nothing of what has happened can be lost!"

Sergei P YURBYU

Tuva Poet

A Tuva Festival

Leaving Kyzyl, the capital of the Tuva Autonomous Region, we set off to attend the summer festival of the collective farm livestock-breeders near the town of Chadan.

The bus took us westward, along the bank of the Upper Yenisei.

When we had passed the outskirts of the capital, we ascended to a plateau along the bank. There, in what was once a desolate, windswept area, deserted except when horse races were held, there are now large factory buildings, including auto-repair shops, a tannery, brewery, bakery and, further down, right at the very edge of the water, a sawmill. One gets the peculiar feeling that all of these buildings with their

great chimneys have run away from Kyzyl to give off their smoke in the vast open spaces, so that the people of the sunlit city which is just awakening may enjoy the pure mountain air and the fresh coolness of the early morning. . . .

We arrived in Chadan late in the evening. Ten years ago the settlement here consisted of but one little crooked street with mud-huts that stuck their heads up above the ground, and some felt tents. Now amid the sea of grain and flowers along the bank of the turbulent Chadan River there is a well-planned, modern town with straight streets and fine buildings.

We took a walk through the town before turning in for the night. We saw garlands of lights at the industrial works and further on the buildings of the stud farm and a model poultry farm, five schools, three club-houses, and one house of culture. The cozy, inviting hotel was buried in greenery and flowers, just as the rest of the town was.

We were up early the next morning. Banners bearing words of greeting and good wishes to the livestock-breeders were stretched across the streets. There was a solemn quiet about the town which was bedecked in holiday attire.

Tuva wrestling





Tuva girls dance

Before long lorries began to appear, decorated with field flowers and fresh branches. They were carrying the livestock-breeders clad in bright red, blue, and green robes. Every lorry had an accordionist on it, and all about we could hear singing. People began to arrive by cart and on horseback. Finally those coming on foot also appeared at the meeting place. Before long the entire square in front of the building of the district executive committee was alive with colour, movement, and noise.

On the platform erected for the occasion were the leaders of the district and beside them the champion livestock-breeders. There was old man Choldak-ool. He was quite grey. Leaning on the rail of the tribune, he bent slightly forward. His voice was still young and energetic.

"I taught my son the art of the shepherd. He was sent to the U.S.S.R. Agricultural Exhibition this year. Now I'm teaching my grandson this work. They tell me it's time for me to take a rest. But I don't agree with them. I'm dreaming of going to the exhibition in Moscow once more. . . ." His last words were drowned in a roar of approval.

The next to speak were a young milk-

maid with long braids down her back and an elderly shepherd in a brown robe, his stiff hair combed high on his head. He had the same keen eyes as the girl.

At last the formal part of the celebration was over.

Beyond the Chadan River there is a large natural park of dense, leafy trees with numerous meadows and glades covering the mountain valley far and wide. A temporary pile bridge has been put up across the river. Although it is shallow here, the river is rapid and foamy. If you go into it knee-deep it will throw you off your feet and carry you away.

The people on horseback waded across the river. The carts and lorries also braved the spray and foam. Only those going on foot, men, women and children, filed across the bridge as they came from the town to the park.

A stage had been erected in one of the glades, a thick grove of bird-cherry tree serving as the back-drop. The audience formed a semi-circle about the platform. From a distance they looked like a flower-bed.

Every collective farm had been preparing for the celebration a long time for each want-



"Flight of the Eagle" dance

ed its singers to sing better than all others, wanted its dancers to dance with more temperament and its musicians to play more buoyantly. And so this concert in honour of the livestock-breeders became a sort of contest of folk talent.

Doluma Mongush, a young milkmaid from the "Red Ploughman" collective farm, came out on the stage in a bright red smock. Accompanied by an accordion, she sang some lyrical songs written by the farmer composer, Bazyr-ool: *Tell Me Something and Why Didn't You Come to Our Tryst?* At first the girl seemed rather nervous and her voice trembled. But why be so nervous when singing such a song at such a celebration and when one is so good to look at! The girl quickly recovered herself and sang better and better. And the people listened with bated breath. When the singing was over the girl's cheeks burned a deep red. She bowed and flushed again. That flower-bed of people rose to their feet and loudly applauded, the echo of the applause resounding far in the mountains.

The next to perform were two amateur singers who equally effectively sang some ballads by the Tuva composers Kendenbil and Byurbee.

The merry sounds of an accordion were heard: two young men came out on the stage from one side, and from the other side

two girls came running towards them. They went through a number of intricate motions in imitation of galloping horses, whirled about the stage, then lined up and whirled off out of sight. They were members of the dance circle of the "Kharum Dag" collective farm, and the dance they performed is called "Horsemen."

For a while the stage was empty. Then a young chap came out, holding a stick in his hand. He was clearly a shepherd who seemed disturbed about something. Looking all about him he suddenly saw what he was seeking and he laughed with joy—he had found the straying sheep! He sat down and some wonderful sounds were heard—this one man sang in two voices simultaneously, one higher and one lower. It is called "throat" singing. Maxim Daklai, who played the part of the shepherd, works at the village club of the "Lenin" collective farm and is an international contest prize winner.

Ak-ool Karasal, who is a virtuoso on the *igil*—a national instrument that resembles the violin—comes from the "Path to Communism" collective farm. He played a pot-pourri of Tuva songs, and had to respond to countless encores for the people simply would not let him go.

Forty race horses of the steppes were led to a starting line. The horses were to run a 20-kilometre stretch along a straight line. The jockeys were ten or twelve-year-old youngsters clad in colourful shirts and trunks. The boys were of the very smallest so that the race-horses would find it easier to do their running.

Tuva wrestling is based on the Olympic system, but it has no weight categories. The last two to wrestle were the broad-shouldered, heavy-weight Kombu, a lorry-driver of the "Red Ploughman" collective farm, and lean Dorzhu, who takes care of a drove of horses. All were certain that Kombu would be victorious. The wrestling bout lasted a long time, and then Dorzhu eluded the heavyweight and threw him. The victor was carried off on the arms of his admirers.

At the end of the celebration the horns began to play loudly and merrily. The victors went up to the tent of the judges to receive their prizes—cups, vases; books and toys.

Dorzhu received a wrist-watch and a shot-gun. Kombu was also given a wrist-watch.

Two small jockeys were probably the happiest of all for one of them was awarded a camera and the other a bicycle.

Evening set in. Tuva is remarkably beautiful at sunset. Long after the sun has set behind the dark-blue outlines of the Altai, the sky is still light. Tongues of flame light up on the mountains while higher up, reaching to the very zenith, the sun's rays shine blindingly, as though a sparkling silvery fan had opened above the earth for an instant.

The festival in the outskirts of Chadan continued long after the sunset.

Lev GABYSHEV

Honoured Art Worker of the
Yakut A.S.S.R.

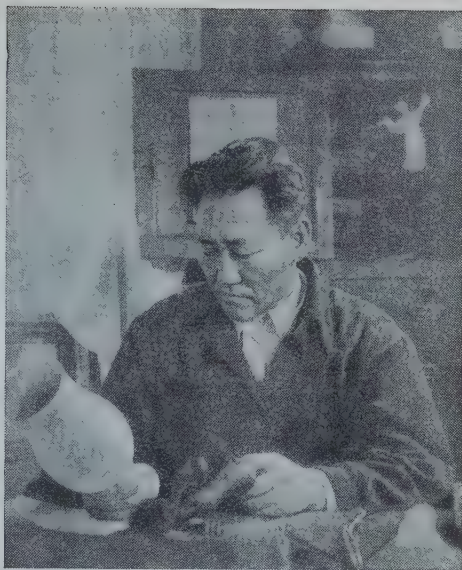
Yakut Ivory Carvers

Carving in ivory is one of the oldest branches of folk decorative art in the Yakut A.S.S.R. It traces its origin back to the distant past. Among the articles found during archaeological excavations on the territory of this republic were some of ivory, ornamented with designs and dating back to the paleolithic era.

The fact that this area is rich in mammoth ivory, which is excellent material for carving, greatly contributed to the development of the art of ivory carving here. Tusks of mammoths are still found in large quantities in the permafrost layer of the steep banks of rivers and lakes, on the shores and islands of the Arctic Ocean and in the so-called "cemeteries of the mammoths."

Mammoth ivory is worked by hand. The carvers themselves always make the chisels and files with which they do their carving. In the past an ordinary Yakut knife was the only instrument used in working with mammoth tusks.

The work of the Yakut ivory-carvers is distinguished by artistic taste and a fine sense of beauty. The miniature sculptures



Ivory carver Terenti Ammosov

reflect an exceptional ability to reproduce from memory what has been seen and to present the image in laconic lines, while everything of secondary importance is ignored.

Yakut carvers of the 18th and 19th centuries made small caskets of ivory, boxes for toilet articles, watch-stands, chess sets, and powder-horns. Whole poems about the colourful yet grim life of the Far North were often depicted in these articles. As the people gradually freed themselves from the ban of the *shamans*, they introduced the image of man more boldly in their work.

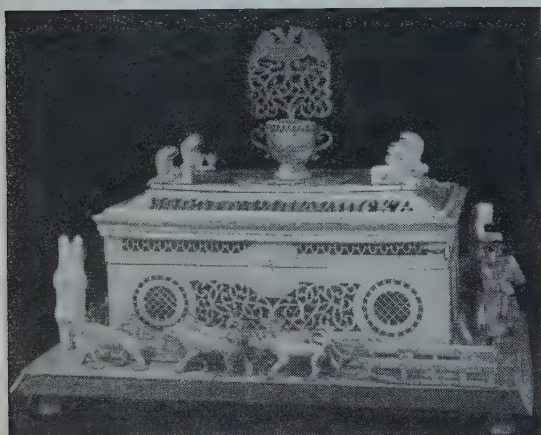
Only a very few articles of those that have come down to us have preserved the names of the people who made them. Those carvers were unable to devote themselves wholly to their favourite art for their work had practically no market.

Today the carvers are united in artels and the best of them are members of the Union of Artists.

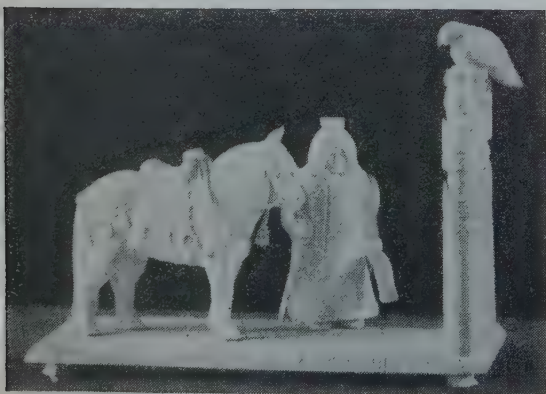
The themes of their work have also greatly changed and cover a much wider field. While preserving the traditional subjects in their



By Semyon Pesteryov



By an unknown ivory carver of the 19th century



By Vasili Popov

work, those depicting the animals and nature of the North, Soviet carvers resort ever more frequently to portrait carving, which was completely unknown to their predecessors.

Special mention should be made of the work of Terenti Ammosov, People's Artist of the Yakut A.S.S.R. While still at school Ammosov was interested in the fine arts, and drew and modelled a great deal. His first works, bas-reliefs of Maxim Gorky and Vasili Chapayev, reflected his unusual talent. Ammosov is equally successful in articles of applied art for which he uses incrustation with horn and polished birch root, and also in miniature sculpture in ivory. His work clearly shows the decorative trend in Yakut bone-carving.

Vasili Popov, Honoured Art Worker of the Yakut A.S.S.R., occupies a special place among modern carvers. He comes from a family of carvers, five generations of Popovs having worked in this line. He makes miniature sculptures on ethnographic themes, which are executed in the traditional Yakut manner. The simplicity of the silhouette and a certain suggestive generalization lend his sculptures a feeling of monumentality and solemnity. Popov's works reflect his fine feeling of the material and superb technique in execution.

There are quite a number of animal artists among the Yakut carvers. Their miniatures of the antlered deer, the thick-maned, fleet-footed Yakut horses, and those dependable helpers and friends of the Yakuts, the Siberian huskies, reveal exceptional powers of observation. Semyon Pesteryov is one of those who has devoted himself to portraying these animals. His sculptures, which are very decorative, effectively convey quickness of motion. The animals carved by this master have natural, dynamic turns of the body; his silhouettes are expressive and the forms plastic.

The new generations of carvers painstakingly preserve the traditions and styles of the old masters. But this ancient art of the people is constantly being enriched with new content.

What the Non-Russian Soviet Peoples Read

"Our fathers and grandfathers," says Said-hodja Urunhudnaye, chairman of the "Moskva" collective farm, Tadjik S.S.R., "always had before their eyes the Bukhara Zindan prison. Today the eyes of the Tadjiks look upon palaces of culture, clubs, libraries. The Great October brought us the light of life!"

There is no corner in Tadjikistan today where you will not find books, magazines, and newspapers.

What books do the Tadjiks read?

Glance at the catalogues in urban and collective-farm libraries or at the titles of books ranged on the bookshelves of private citizens and everywhere you will find Tadjik translations of the Russian classics, among them Pushkin, Ostrovsky, Goncharov, Dostoyevsky, Nekrasov, Saltykov-Shchedrin, Leo Tolstoy, Turgenev, Chekhov. Modern Russian writers, from Gorky on, and the writers of other Soviet peoples are also well known and loved.

In every public library and many private ones you will also find Tadjik translations of foreign classics and modern authors.

The Tadjik people also have many talented writers of their own now, and their works occupy a prominent place in the family of Soviet literatures.

The Tuva people acquired a written language only after the October Revolution. Now a good many classics, both Russian and foreign, and modern writers have already been translated into the Tuva language.

Each of the national republics has produced its own writers since the establishment of Soviet power. There are, for instance, the Kazakh writers Auezov, Jambul, and Mukanov, whose books have seen 62, 80, and 70 editions respectively, and the Uzbek writers Aibek, Gulyam, and Kakhar, with 43, 64, and 42 editions respectively.

Books by foreign authors have become part and parcel of the life of all the Soviet peoples. Shakespeare and Hugo, to mention only two, have been published in the Kazakh, Kirghizian, Mordovian, Turkmen, Uzbek, Udmurtian, and Yakut languages. A volume of Merimée's selected works has even been translated into the Gypsy language.

Non-Russian Soviet writers have in their turn been translated into many foreign languages. The Kazakh writers Auezov and Mukanov, for example, have been brought out in English, German, Spanish, Chinese, and French; the Turkmen writer Kerbabayev in German and Finnish; the Tadjik poet Lahuti in English, German, French and Persian; the Uzbek novelist Aibek in French.

In 1913 Lenin wrote: "There remains but one such barbaric country in Europe as Russia where the masses have been so completely robbed of education, of light and knowledge."

Today the Soviet Union is a land of 100 per cent literacy, where books have penetrated to every corner, however remote. You can find them in the home of every Soviet citizen, from the snowed-in dwellings of the Yakut deer-breeders to the pretty cottages of the gardeners of sunny Georgia.

OUR CONTRIBUTORS

Mirzo Tursun-zade, a Tadjik poet was born into a family of a carpenter in a village of Karatag in 1911. Later he moved to Tashkent where he graduated from the Tadjik Institute of Education.

His literary career began in 1930 and his first collection of verses and stories appeared in 1932; in 1939 it was followed by his second collection of verses and then, in 1940, by the autobiographical poem *Hissar Valley*.

Tursun-zade also tried his forces in drama. He is the author of the play *Sentence* (1934), the musical drama *Khosrov and Shirin*, based on Nizami's poem, and the libretto for the first Tadjik opera *The Uprising of Voce* (1939).

During the Second World War Tursun-zade wrote many patriotic verses and poems, among which *The Son of His Motherland* and musical drama *Takhir and Zukhra* are the most significant.

After the war Tursun-zade has been taking an active part in peace movement. He is Chairman of the Soviet Committee of Solidarity of Asian Countries. As a champion of peace he visited India, Pakistan, Thailand, Iran, China, and other countries.

Of his works dedicated to international events most popular are his verses about India and his collections *I Am of Free East* (1951) and *The Laws of Fraternity* (1953).

One of his latest poems *Hasan-Arbakesh* (1954) got wide renown.

Mirzo Tursun-zade is also known as a publicist and literary critic.

Mamed Raghim (Mamed Raghim Abar ogly Guseinov) was born in 1907 in Baku. He graduated from Azerbaidjan University, Faculty of Oriental Studies, in 1931.

Mamed Raghim began his literary career in 1925 and five years later his first book of poems entitled *Desire* was published, to be followed by the collection *Book Two* in 1932.

In the thirties Mamed Raghim published his poem *The Immortal Hero* whose theme is the life of one of the outstanding Soviet leaders, Sergei Kirov. Later, during the Second World War, he published verse devoted to the labour and heroism of the Soviet people. Among these poems the most popular are *Three Brothers*, *Twofold Guilt*, *Without You*, *Yet With You* and *Back in Moscow*.

The crown of the poet's work during the war years is *The Skies of Leningrad* (1947), which describes the defence of the hero city. *On the Banks of the Caspian*, a collection of post-war poems, was published in 1948. In recent years the poet has taken for theme the struggle for peace and democracy, as in his *Nazim Hikmet*, *Light*, *The Seven Negroes*, and other poems.

Mamed Raghim's work deeply reflects the motives and imagery of Azerbaidjanian folklore. Many of his poems that are remarkable for their lyrical and musical qualities are sung, along with the classical *gazels*, by the *ashugs*, the traditional Azerbaidjanian folk singers.

Mamed Raghim is also a playwright (he wrote the verse drama *Khagani*) and a translator of the Russian poets Pushkin and Lermontov, and the classical Georgian poet Rustaveli.

Aaly Tokombayev is a versatile writer from Soviet Kirghizia whose work includes poems, prose, plays, and literary criticism. He was born in 1904 in Chon-Kemin. His parents were poor, and left him an orphan at the age of twelve, to face years of poverty and hardship.

In 1922 his friends helped him to go to Tashkent where he studied first at a workers' school and then at the University.

His poem *The Coming of October* was published in *Erkin Too*, the first Kirghiz newspaper, in 1924. It was not only the beginning of his literary career, but also the beginning of Kirghiz written poetry.

Tokombayev's first book of verse entitled *Lenin* was published in 1927. He was greatly influenced by Russian literature, especially by the work of Gorky and Mayakovsky. In the thirties he published more books of verse, including *The Flowers of Labour* and *Attack* in 1932, and *Early Poems* in the following year. In his verse he combines deep political feeling and lyrical meditation. He sings of his native Kirghizia, her clear springs, and the blue waters of Lake Issyk-kul, the tranquil mountain paths and the cool mountain pastures, the work and thoughts of his people.

Tokombayev also writes stories, novels, and plays (the story *The Wounded Heart*, the plays *The Masters of the Forest*, *The Vow*, *Honour*, and the verse novel *Blood-Stained Dawns*.)

In recent years Tokombayev has written a cycle of poems entitled *The Lenin Library* and the poem *Travellers Meet*.

Ellyai is the pen-name of Serafim Kulachikov, the Yakut poet who was born in Yakutia in 1904. His parents were peasants. He graduated from the Institute of Journalism in Moscow in 1928.

Ellyai's first poems were published in 1924. In 1929 his first book of collected verse was published and in the thirties he wrote another book called *A Happy Life*.

In 1938 he published *Churum-Churumchuku*, a poem about the people's happiness, based on a fairy-tale subject taken from Yakut folklore. This was followed by *Happiness of the Yakut*, *A Friend of the People*, *The Patriot*, *Prometheus*, etc.

Ellyai was in the Soviet Army during the war and wrote a cycle of patriotic poems which were later included in the collection *In Defence of the Sunny Land*.

Ellyai is often called the poet of the North. His work gives the reader a picture of Yakutia with its bitter winters and its snow-storms, the beautiful Lena and the wonderful cities that have sprung up. The theme of love and friendship holds an important place in his work, feelings of civil conscience are combined with lyricism and gentleness.

His poetry is inspired by life itself, for, as he says, "Poetry! Thou art in songs and dreams, in ripe wheat-ears and pearls of rain, in the thoughts and deeds of the people."

Pyotr Skosyrev was born in Moscow in 1900 and studied at Saratov University. In 1919 his first collection of verse was published under the title of *Blue and Gold Horizons*. Most of Skosyrev's work is devoted to the Soviet Central-Asian republics (the book of verse *Poor Hasan*, 1926; the novel *The Asian*, 1931; the story *Farkhad*, 1944, etc.).

Skosyrev is also a literary critic. He wrote *Turkmenian Literature* in 1945 and *Leaves and Flowers* in 1957. The latter is a collection of literary portraits, essays, and notes on Turkmenian literature.

Skosyrev is Chairman of the Commission on Literatures of the Soviet Republics, one of the commissions of the Soviet Writers' Union.

Semyon Kirsanov was born in Odessa in 1906. He published his first collections of verse *Taking Aim* and *Experience* in 1926 and 1927. His other poems include *Comrade Marx*, *Alexander Matrosoy*, *Makar Mazai*, *For You*, *The Summit*, and the collections

Four Notebooks, Of Love and Hatred, The Rainbow Path, etc. He is also known as the translator of Mickiewicz, Nazim Hikmet, and Pablo Neruda.

Semyon Kirsanov is a member of the editorial board of *Soviet Literature*.

Taken Alimkulov was born in the south of Kazakhstan in 1922. His parents were peasants. In 1952 he graduated from the Gorky Literary Institute in Moscow. He began his career with a collection of verse entitled *Setting Out*. This was followed by books of short stories and essays (*The Secret, Character*, etc.).

Alimkulov is also a translator and literary critic. He has translated Russian classics into Kazakh (Pushkin, Lermontov) and Soviet writers (Pavlenko, Galina Nikolayeva).

He recently finished a collection of articles on Kazakh literature entitled *Past and Present*.

Sergei Khmel'nitsky was born in Dnepropetrovsk in 1925. Having graduated from the Moscow Institute of Architecture he left for Bukhara where he studied ancient architecture. On his return to Moscow he worked at the central scientific restoration shops. At present he is a post-graduate student at the Academy of Sciences, Institute of Art History.

Mariam Ignatyeva, a graduate of Moscow Conservatoire, was born in Moscow in 1911. She is the author of numerous articles on Soviet music.

Pavel Luknitsky, born in 1900 in Leningrad, graduated from Leningrad University in 1925. His first collection of verse appeared in 1927. During the Great Patriotic War he was TASS war correspondent.

Luknitsky travelled much in the Soviet Union, especially in Central Asia. He is the author of more than twenty books, among them the novel *Nisso* and *Travelling in the Pamirs*.

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Lie under a birch-tree on the soft cool grass and let the sunbeams of a bright blue, noon sky play on you through the leaves. The faint-rustling birch whispers to you as it leans down to your head and stirs your feeling with some fairy-tale.

In the tales of Tvardovsky, Soloukhin and Gribachov, which will appear in the next number of "Soviet Literature" you will discover the beauty of the Russian countryside and learn about the lives of those who dwell in the forest and on the steppe.

Galina Nikolayeva is known to our readers for her novel "Harvest." Her latest novel "Battle Along the Road," a controversial work which has aroused much interest among Soviet readers, will appear in "Soviet Literature" No. 10.

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In "Soviet Literature" No. 11 we are publishing Alexander Gonchar's novel "Perekop" which tells how the red flag was hoisted over Perekop.